

Towards the CEFR Action-Oriented Approach: Factors Influencing its Achievement in Thai EFL Classrooms

NUNTAPAT SUPUNYA
Mahasarakham University, Thailand
thebporn.kanchai@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has been globally accepted as a framework for language teaching, learning, and assessment. Thailand also adopted the CEFR in 2014 to escalate its English education quality in all levels, placing an emphasis on an action-oriented approach nationwide. Few studies have explored the factors influencing the successful CEFR implementation. As such, the current study, framed in a social constructivist case study methodology, used an in-depth interview with four in-service English teachers from four different regions to investigate the factors contributing to the achievement of the action-oriented approach in a Thai EFL context. The thematic analysis revealed thirteen potential factors that teachers believed affected the implementation of the CEFR, categorised into three different levels – policy, administration, and instruction-oriented. The pedagogical and policy implications were further discussed and generalised to other similar contexts.

Keywords: CEFR, Action-oriented approach; EFL Teachers; CEFR in Thailand; teaching practice

INTRODUCTION

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) is considered a reference guideline for language learning and teaching. After an extensive development process undertaken by the Council of Europe (CoE), the CEFR was officially published in 2001 (CoE, 2001). The development of the CEFR serves the purposes of “the promotion of the positive formulation of educational aims and outcomes at all levels”, the provision of “transparency and clear reference points for assessment purposes to inform curriculum reform and pedagogy”, and “assistance for learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies and educational administrators to situate and co-ordinate their efforts” (CoE, 2018, p. 25). The CEFR has now been adopted in many countries, including those in Asia for example, in China (Jin, Wu, Anderson, & Song, 2014), Japan (Negishi & Tono, 2014), Malaysia (Uri & Aziz, 2018, 2020) and Vietnam (Hung, 2013). The widespread adoption of the CEFR brings about the transformation into language education, not only in instruction, but also in material utilisation, curriculum and course design, testing and assessment, and beyond.

In 2014, the CEFR was introduced to the English language education system in Thailand with the goals pertaining to the escalation of the English language teaching quality at all levels (Ministry of Education, 2014). The framework was implemented to deal with the unsatisfactory language competency level of Thai students, as evident in English Proficiency index 2020, illustrating Thailand was ranked 89 out of 100 countries and 7th in Southeast Asia (Education First Standard English, 2020). Furthermore, the CEFR was intended to assist Thai learners of English to build up their language competence to be able to work in English speaking environments (e.g.,

ASEAN Economic Community – AEC), and to increase the economic competitiveness of Thai workforce (Ministry of Education, 2014). In the same year, the Ministry of Education (MoE) announced the policy “*English Language Teaching Reform*” to enhance the English education quality (Ministry of Education, 2014). The reformed policy established a nexus between the adopted framework and its action-oriented approach (AoA) – a communication-based instruction to foster the communicative use of English within classrooms. Consequently, Thai English teachers have been required to follow the policy-informed guidelines, meaning that teachers’ long-established conventional pedagogy (e.g., grammar-translation, and audio-lingual method) is subject to (re)adjustment to be more communicative in nature without having considered other context-related factors (i.e., classroom size, teachers’ English language proficiency, and CEFR-related knowledge) that may play a vital role in such implementation. As such, we do not yet understand the factors influencing the achievement of the CEFR’s action-oriented approach in the EFL context, particularly in Thailand, as few studies investigated this issue from in-service EFL teachers from four regions – North, South, Southeast, and Central.

Framed in a social constructivist case study methodology, this paper aimed to explore factors that influenced the achievement of the CEFR action-oriented approach used in Thai EFL classrooms. Given that few studies in a Thai EFL context, this was to gain in-depth insights from in-service EFL teachers who have undertaken the Boot Camp to better assess the implementation of the CEFR approach. The results from this bottom-up enquiry will yield implications for classroom management and better policy implementation. Specifically, the research question for this study was: *What are the potential factors influencing the achievement of the CEFR action-oriented approach in the Thai EFL classroom?*

THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE (CEFR)

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) is considered the standardised reference guideline for language teaching and learning, developed by the Council of Europe (CoE) (Council of Europe, 2001), that focuses on communicative use and exchange of knowledge (Little, 2007). The CEFR highlights numerous crucial concepts, including (1) coherence and transparency promotion among language professionals to rely on one metalanguage, (2) communicative language use or “language for a social purpose”, rather than only linguistic mastery, (3) plurilingualism or the ability to use all linguistic repertoires for meaning making in certain contextualised conversations, and (4) partial language competences or uneven language skills (North, 2014, p.10). In a 290-page book, the CEFR outlines its use in four distinctive domains (Council of Europe, 2001). The first domain is an underlying teaching and learning practice, called “an action-oriented approach”, which considers language learners as “language users” who utilise their linguistic instruments to engage in a socially communicative circumstance. Another CEFR domain concerns the Common Reference Levels of language proficiency, which classifies learners’ second or foreign language competency into six levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2). These levels are beneficial for pedagogical practice, assessment alignment and accountability. The final two domains are related to the application of the Common Reference Levels in language teaching and learning and CEFR as a framework for testing and assessment purposes.

In Thailand, since its official introduction in 2014, some attempts have been made to investigate the implementation of the CEFR framework. Investigations into English language teachers' understanding of the CEFR have shown that the CEFR was solely perceived by secondary school teachers as a reference level for teachers and learners and was not adopted in language syllabus and classroom practice (Franz & Teo, 2017). Another study has shown that university lecturers appear to have a good understanding of the CEFR, specifically in the domains of the CEFR reference levels, its applications for teaching and learning, and assessments, but had little knowledge on the underlying approach for language teaching and learning, i.e., the action-oriented approach (Kanchai, 2019). Recently, Phoolaikao and Sukying (2021) investigated 200 preservice teachers' views of the CEFR and its implementation using a mixed-method design. The findings revealed that preservice teachers have a high level of understanding of the CEFR in the domains of assessment and reference levels, while their insights into the framework appeared somewhat limited. For a test alignment, the CEFR was utilised to map an in-house test (CU-TEP) to the CEFR levels using a standard-setting methodology and expert judgement (Wudthayagorn, 2018). Overall, more empirical studies from within classroom are needed in a Thai EFL context to shed light on the practicality of the framework implementation.

ACTION-ORIENTED APPROACH TO RISE COMMUNICATIVE ENGLISH USE

The action-oriented approach focuses on the use of language for communicative purposes. The CEFR regards language learners as language users or “social agents” who have tasks or “language actions” to accomplish. These social agents develop their competences and strategies through social communicative interactions (Council of Europe, 2018). This CEFR approach includes four domains of language use, including public, personal, occupational and educational, and provides language activities, tasks and strategies for teachers to use in their action-oriented instruction. The CEFR “advocates going beyond the communicative approach to emphasise active language use that develops five language skills – spoken production, spoken interaction, listening, reading, and writing which includes the skills required for writing to interact” (Curriculum Services Canada, n.d.). Action-oriented tasks are designed to meet the learners' daily communicative needs in a variety of situations. The tasks are considered open-ended and require learners to apply their knowledge and skills for given tasks within a specific social context (Council of Europe, 2018). Hence, the action-oriented approach is the key approach for language teachers to use in their instruction because of its emphasis on communicative language use, rather than requiring learners to remember discrete linguistic features with little connection to meaningful communicative applications.

The MoE's 2014 “English language teaching reform policy” established a nexus between the CEFR and the action-oriented approach with a focus on communicative use of English in their pedagogical contexts (Akkakoson, 2019; Jindapitak, 2019). In doing so, the MoE worked in conjunction with the British Council in Thailand to develop a teacher-training programme, “*Boot Camp*”, to assist in-service English teachers use English in their classroom (British Council Thailand, 2016) and enhance English language teaching quality (Mala, 2016). Moreover, the use of such approach in classrooms is associated with the required competency levels as outlined in the policy documents. That is, A1 is the target achievement level for primary learners (Grade 6), A2 is set for secondary (grade 3) learners, and B1 is for secondary (grade 6) and vocational students

(English Language Institute, 2015, p. 2). As such, Thai EFL teachers are required to apply the action-oriented approach to teach students in each level as advocated in such policy.

Studies have examined the implementation of the action-oriented approach in Thai EFL classrooms. It is evident that this implementation has been unsatisfactory due to multiple factors. The factors include (1) the nature of large classrooms, including varying language abilities and limited teaching time (Sanpatchayapong, 2017), (2) lack of awareness into the CLT and action-oriented approach (Foley, 2021), (3) underemployment in classrooms, (4) dominance of conventional teaching approach – grammar translation, examination-oriented nature (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Kanchai, 2019; Kulsiri, 2006; Nonthisong, 2015; Thongsri, 2005), and (5) teachers' language proficiency levels (Franz & Teo, 2017). To date, only two empirical studies have attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of the Boot Camp, including the use of an action-oriented approach and factors that hindered its implementation in teachers. Firstly, Sunyakul and Teo's (2020) study suggested that, after participating in Boot Camp, language teachers often applied the knowledge and skills obtained from the training to their instruction. Again, some factors concerning teachers, students and school contexts were evident to hinder the knowledge-and-skill implementation. Another in-depth inquiry by Kanchai (2019) explored tertiary teachers' viewpoints towards the impact of the CEFR on their teaching practice. The results suggested that few teachers employed the action-oriented approach in their instruction due to a scarcity of its literature and teachers' understandings of such approach. It would therefore be useful to further explore the factors that influence the achievement of the action-oriented approach in English language teaching and learning in EFL classrooms. This may provide practical results for, first, language teachers on possible factors they may encounter when applying such an approach and then other stakeholders involved in designing professional development programmes and policy enactment to adjust their administrative trajectory to improve the quality of English education.

METHODOLOGY

To investigate the factors influencing the achievement of the CEFR's action-oriented approach implementation in Thai EFL classrooms after teachers' exposure into Boot Camp, a teacher training programme with the focus on communicative English use, a case study based on a social constructivist paradigm was adopted. Such an approach allows the researcher to study meanings, ideologies, and socially constructed realities within their participants' context (Creswell, 2014). To this end, the current study used this paradigm to view the meanings that were socially constructed by Thai in-service EFL teachers, concerning the factors influencing the implementation of an action-oriented approach in their own pedagogical context. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were applied as a main heuristic (see Instrument).

PARTICIPANTS

Four Thai EFL in-service teachers volunteered to participate in this research project. The convenience sampling method was used to select the participants (Creswell, 2014; Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015). All participants had previously agreed to use the action-oriented approach of the CEFR and had attended the Boot Camp organised by the MoE in conjunction with the British Council in their provincial areas – *Pathum Thani, Chiang Rai, Khon Kaen, and Songkla*. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used when referring to the participants within the study (see

Table 1). Two participants were males and two were females. One teacher taught at a primary level, while the rest taught at a secondary level of education. A half of the participants categorised themselves at B1 levels while the other two participants were at B2 for their English language proficiency level of CEFR. Two participants had obtained a master’s degree while the other two participants held a bachelor’s degree. The average teaching experience was approximately 4 years.

TABLE 1. Participants’ demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Qualification	Years of Teaching Exp.	Level	Self-rated proficiency	Attended CEFR-oriented training
Chaiyon	Male	26	Master	4	Primary	B1	Yes
Jinda	Female	27	Bachelor	3	Secondary	B1	Yes
Sunchai	Male	28	Bachelor	4	Secondary	B2	Yes
Tangtai	Female	28	Master	6	Secondary	B2	Yes

INSTRUMENTS

A semi-structured interview was used to gain an in-depth understanding into the factors influencing the implementation of the action-oriented approach in a Thai EFL classroom. Interviews are a frequently adopted research instrument in applied linguistics for in-depth examinations (Miles et al., 2014) and are useful for qualitative research as they rely less on ongoing observations, which may cause some unwillingness to participate (Zhang, 2010). Semi-structured interviews also encourage participants to freely express their perspectives concerning pedagogy in a more natural, conversational environment (Creswell, 2014; Given, 2008) and it allows the researcher to control the line of the questioning (Zhang, 2010). In this study, some interview questions had been pre-determined by the researcher, together with one invited ELT expert who obtained a PhD degree in TESOL with 12-year teaching experience prior to the interview to maintain the content validity of the interview questions. In constructing the interview questions, ten interview questions were initially formulated by the researcher and the ELT expert, and later four were deleted due to their ambiguity, and inappropriate language use in the questions. This was to ensure that the interview questions were to capture the research construct. The interview lasted approximately one to two hours depending upon the availability of the volunteer participants. The interviews were carried out in participants’ native Thai language to ensure that there was no language barrier (Wang et al., 2020). The non-English responses from the participants were not translated into English as to prevent the syntactic inequivalence (Sechrest et al., 1972). However, some statements were translated into English in the findings section for international audiences. All the interviews were audio-recorded for further analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

The current study employed a qualitative thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews to identify, analyse and account thematic patterns emerging from the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2014). As outlined by Creswell (2014), the data analysis followed six steps: (1) gathering the data, (2) preparing the collected data for further analyses, (3) reading extensively through the data obtained, (4) coding the data, (5) establishing themes, and (6) interpreting the meanings of themes. To ensure the data accuracy, a member-checking technique was conducted by returning the complete audio transcripts to each participant for their self-accuracy checking

(Creswell, 2014; Rose et al., 2020). After the modification made by the participants, the data were then coded manually by the researcher and one invited ELT scholar to foster the coding reliability. Specifically, the researcher and the invited ELT scholar analysed the data individually, and then, on the second round, they brought their analysed data to conduct a co-analysis, resolving disagreements. This was to maintain the trustworthiness and reliability (Paltreidge & Phakiti, 2015). The prepared data were coded due to its significance and shared value. After that, the emergent themes were classified into three different factor levels, including policy, administration and instruction-oriented.

FINDINGS

The qualitative data analysis revealed thirteen factors influencing the achievement of the action-oriented approach in EFL classroom, which could be classified into three distinct but interrelated levels – (a) policy-related level, (b) administration-related level, and (c) instruction-relation level as illustrated in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2. Factors influencing the achievement of the CEFR Action-Oriented Approach (AoA) at different levels

Level	Factors influencing action-oriented classroom achievement
Policy-related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective translation of policy to practice • Concrete guidelines with exemplars
Administration-related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good communication to promote mutual understanding to all stakeholders • Good understandings of the CEFR and the AoA • Administrative roles in implementing the AoA and facilitating practice • Provision of opportunities for peer-to-peer pedagogical reflection • Promotion of EFL teachers' self-efficacy in using the AoA
Instruction-related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good understandings of the AoA • Confidence in using the AoA • Pedagogical Knowledge in analysing learners' needs • Sociolinguistic knowledge to facilitate communicative interaction • Pedagogical innovation to developing action-oriented activities • Self-adaptation against conventional teaching culture

FACTORS AT A POLICY-RELATED LEVEL

The findings revealed three fundamental factors that influenced the implementation of the CEFR framework and its action-oriented approach. First, an effective policy-to-practice translation appeared to be an initial concern when adopting the overseas-oriented language policy prior to contextualising it into an EFL context, like Thailand. As evident in Excerpts [1] – [4], all language teachers admitted that the government should establish a more systemic metalanguage to be deployed throughout the nation to foresee both the expected and unexpected after the adoption of such language policy.

[1] I think that the MoE should have a good system to lead all people in the language education system to the same goal to see the same picture as a whole. If we really need change to happen, we will have to take it seriously. Otherwise, it will end the same way as those in the past. More systemic procedures will do the job in translating the policy to classroom.

[2] We understand about the policy change, but it might be better if the key steps under the policy adaptation are communicated to us, practitioners at a classroom level, suggesting how to do things.

[3] I know that it requires such a big amount of money to fuel the new change in English education policy. Therefore, we need a good system in so doing so that we could estimate the outcome and prepare for the unexpected to happen during or after the processes of adaptation.

[4] Every time we need to change our pedagogical practice to serve the new language education policy, we are only told of what to do. But, we also need how-to knowledge to facilitate the implementation.

Another factor was related to the provision of concrete guidelines with sufficient instructional examples of action-oriented tasks. At the initial stage of the CEFR policy implementation, language teachers encountered the absence of sufficient information concerning the adopted CEFR policy and its underlying approach. Thai EFL teachers normally based their practices on their limited understanding of the CEFR and action-oriented approach and existing teaching materials at hand. To foster a more effective translation of the policy to practice, this factor needs to be taken into consideration by policy-makers. For example, one Thai EFL teachers commented that:

[5] I think we don't mind adopting the new language policy, but we need clear and sufficient information so that we can work on our own designing language activities...we also need concrete examples of teaching materials, tasks, or activities so that we can directly apply some into our classroom...because we believe that the provided examples have been confirmed by the MoE. So, it is right to use those examples in our instruction.

The last factor concerns good communication as a top-down approach to promote a mutual understanding in applying the new language policy with its action-oriented approach, which relates to the key aim of the CEFR to promote the transparency and mutuality in implementing the framework. With effective top-down communication, all stakeholders in language education throughout the nation may receive the intended messages from the MoE. This will also prevent divergences occurring in the policy-to-practice translation processes. The following excerpt supports these claims:

[6] Good communication from the MoE to the practitioners is the key, I guess. It can help all people (stakeholders) see the same picture and know what the MoE wishes use to practice accordingly for our students. The good communication may help us, language teachers at the classroom level, understand more about what the case for our students is really and what we can do to help them learn under this new language policy.

The aforementioned factors need to be taken into consideration by policy makers to establish a more systemic and effective procedure to translate and communicate about the policy or the highlighted approach between the stakeholders at different levels of the language education system. To foster the achievement of the action-oriented approach, these factors should also be considered at the initial stage of the adoption of the framework to promote a clear understanding across practitioners.

FACTORS AT AN ADMINISTRATION-RELATED LEVEL

The analysis further showed that there are four main factors influencing the achievement of the action-oriented approach in Thai EFL classroom at an administration-oriented level. After the adoption of the new language policy, those in charge of administration, especially school directors, may need to consider these emerging factors. The first influential factor regards the good understanding of the CEFR and the action-oriented approach. Although the school directors are not considered the practitioners of the action-oriented approach, to some extent, they should understand the CEFR and its approach in order to effectively facilitate teaching and learning

management. This will also allow the directors to (re)consider the physical limitations, professional development for teachers, and challenges in the application at their local context. For instance, some of the Thai EFL teachers stated that:

[7] I am not expecting the director to know the CEFR and its approach well...he needs to know at least what the CEFR is and which fundamental aspects to be implemented in the school...it can help with the contextualisation of the CEFR action-oriented approach in the classroom and it may help us work with classroom applications.

[8] The school director needs to understand what it is and how to apply it into our classroom. Our school is not the same as other big schools in the province. We have lots of limitations. Our students are not that ready for this, and so are teachers.

With a good understanding of the CEFR action-oriented approach, the administrators could alter their administrative trajectory to facilitate the classroom applications. As evident in Excerpt 5, this can be achieved by considering the limitations (e.g., classroom context, the time allowance for English subject, language remedial courses for low-proficiency students, and communication-oriented material provision) to facilitate classroom practice. Teachers are indeed the practitioners of the action-oriented approach; however, administrators should also work in conjunction with language teachers.

The teachers noted the provision of opportunities for Thai EFL teachers to reflect on their action-oriented practices. For example, the head of the English language department could conduct pedagogical reflection activities; however, this may not be effective in some contexts where internal conflicts exist among teacher cohorts. Thai EFL teachers stated that some of their peers did not support the action-oriented approach and its applications as they always used a conventional approach (e.g., grammar-translation). As such, those teachers did not see the benefit in embracing the action-oriented approach underlying the use of language for communication. The following excerpts illustrate these findings:

[9] Here we do pedagogical reflection activity in our department once a week... talking about problems, lacks, wants, and more to share good practices among teachers. It is the way to promote a good working environment as well. When teacher get a chance to share their thoughts about teaching, they feel recognised.

[10] There are always those old-fashioned teachers who never use an action-oriented approach... but the point is we need to include them to take about what they think about our action-oriented practices. When they feel recognised, they might start to change some of their classroom practice.

Another significant factor concerns Thai EFL teachers' self-efficacy in using the action-oriented approach in their language classroom. Self-efficacy was developed through teachers' engagement in the pedagogical reflection activity provided by the school administrators. As shown in Excerpt 9, when language teachers felt recognised, they had confidence in teaching using the action-oriented approach. When implementing the approach, Thai EFL teachers encountered uncertainty in practicing the action-oriented activities, despite attending the Boot Camp. Hence, the current findings indicate that, after the initial training, to sustain the action-oriented practices, collaborative pedagogical reflection should be implemented to facilitate teachers' self-efficacy in using action-oriented practices.

FACTORS AT AN INSTRUCTION-RELATED LEVEL

The analysis further indicated a total of six instruction-related factors that influenced the achievement of the action-oriented approach in an EFL context. These were factors related to the teachers in the language classroom. Thai EFL teachers agreed that a good understanding of the

action-oriented approach was a substantial element to consider before adopting the CEFR approach. Indeed, some Thai EFL teachers encountered confusion about the conceptualised notion of such approach and its nature, resulting in the mistranslation or a divergence between the adopted approach and the actual classroom practice, as shown in the following excerpt:

[11] The first thing is that we need to understand the concept or underlying concept of the framework and more importantly the action-oriented approach so that we can apply it into classroom. What I have experienced is that the training focused too much about the ready-to-eat activities and tasks, which is good for us; however, understanding of the approach may lead to a more sustained way when we need to design our communicative language activities appropriate for our context.

Hence, to effectively apply the action-oriented approach, an understanding of the approach, in conjunction with the best practice, needs to be promoted at the beginning of the professional development programme. Moreover, as evident in the excerpt 11, the sustainability of the action-oriented approach in EFL classroom will likely be improved if teachers are provided with a solid foundation of understanding.

Another important factor concerns teachers' confidence in using the action-oriented approach in their language classroom. The participants revealed that confidence was built on a solid understanding of the adopted approach and weekly collaborative pedagogical reflection at their department. These two sources could potentially assist Thai EFL teachers in applying the action-oriented approach more often in their classrooms, as demonstrated in the following statements:

[12] I feel confident with what I do in class after I have participated in the peer-to-peer reflection. Sometimes I struggled with how to run my lesson...teaching grammar and difficult vocabularies is difficult when blending them into communication because I want to make them clear to the students.
[13] If we understand what we need to do, we will be more confident. What it means by "action-oriented" is the key, though. Although I have gone through the training, it does not mean that I have understood everything. The training is just the broad guide of how to do things in class, but how we can translate the obtained knowledge into classroom practice depends on ourselves.

Pedagogical knowledge is considered one of the factors influencing the achievement of the action-oriented approach. This type of knowledge is required to analyse learners' linguistic needs so that teachers can use the action-oriented approach to help students learn and acquire the linguistic features through communication. All teachers in the study admitted that they needed to be aware of the varying language abilities in one student cohort, which determined the flow of their action-oriented instruction. Indeed, Thai EFL teachers practiced the action-oriented teaching but also need to rely on their metacognition to determine what teaching approaches they believed would work in conjunction with the action-oriented approach to help low-proficient learners engage in communicative interaction with other peers. Some stated:

[14] We sometimes used other existing teaching approaches to help our students learn in class. Obviously, we used an action-oriented approach as a main approach in language teaching; however, in our context where the English language is not normally spoken and many students cannot produce understandable English, some other teaching approaches are used to accompany the teaching.

Besides pedagogical knowledge, sociolinguistic knowledge can influence the implementation of the action-oriented approach. Thai EFL teachers needed to embrace the diversity of the plurilingual use of the languages (Thai and English) and local dialect in communicative interaction. Students in different regions have their own local dialect, and, as long

as it is meaningful, it should be acceptable in classroom. However, some teachers stated that they needed to balance the percentage of English language as a medium of interaction and learners' L1 in the classroom to increase learners' exposure to the target language, as evident in Excerpt 15:

[15] The approach highlights the use of English for communicative purposes and as a teacher we need to do anything we can to promote that. However, we cannot deny the use of the local language or our native Thai as well. L1 Jokes in classroom also help students understand more about how to use some grammar points, for example. It is the matter of balancing the use of the two languages when it comes to communication.

The next factor is pedagogical innovation to develop action-oriented activities in EFL classroom. Indeed, the Boot Camp training provided concrete example activities for Thai EFL teachers to use in their instruction, but they appeared limited and uncontextualised. In fact, when a language class starts, teachers normally conduct a needs analysis to explore the current level of language competence so that they can make instructional decision(s) on pedagogical tasks and activities in their own context. Some activities provided by the training worked while others did not. Hence, pedagogical innovation should be promoted. Excerpt 16 supports this finding:

[16] Some activities we learn from the Boot Camp work well with our students, but a lot of them seems inappropriate. This is because our students in one big class do not come from the same language level...and some language contents (e.g., culture points) are unrelatable to our context. It is difficult to lead a communicative activity. In my case, I decide my own action-oriented activities for my students.

Self-adaptation against conventional teaching culture was another instruction-related factor identified by the participants to determine the successful implementation of the CEFR approach. That is, in one school or language department, there are often a mixture of novice, middle aged, and long-experienced teachers. Therefore, there is a gap among generations. Thai EFL teachers in the current study came to an agreement that almost young teachers were selected for the training, leaving "old-fashioned" teachers, who mostly value the conventionalised approach, behind. Applying the action-oriented approach in school could sometimes be seen as face-threatening or challenging to some teachers who hold conventional teaching beliefs. One of the participants stated that:

[17] It is challenging to me or other teachers who practice the new approach because other old-fashioned teachers do not do the same. Students normally make a comparison between the two teaching approaches. Nobody wants to speak because they are not confident with their English, they feel shy, or they cannot even produce the language in communication.

DISCUSSION

Given the paucity of research concerning the CEFR action-oriented approach implementation, this qualitative research aimed to investigate Thai EFL teachers' insights into the factors influencing the achievement of the adopted approach, as enforced by the MoE. The findings are categorised into three broad levels, including policy-related, administration-related, and instruction-related factors. One shared factor across the three levels is the understanding of the CEFR and the action-oriented approach, which appears to be the fundamental element that needs to be established before the implementation of the framework and its approach. Consistent with previous studies, it was found that practitioners in the language education system require a more thorough understanding of the CEFR and the action-oriented approach (Kanchai, 2019; Phoolaikao & Sukying, 2021).

Indeed, a lack of understanding can result in an unwillingness to apply the approach into classroom practices (Franz & Teo, 2017). Moreover, several studies also revealed that the CEFR reference levels (A1 – A2, B1 – B2, C1 – C2) of language competence that are used to justify learners' language development are considered abstract and not user-friendly (Byrnes, 2007; Figueras, 2012; Green, 2012; Kanchai, 2019; Komorowska, 2004; North, 2009, 2014). As such, these aspects need to be seriously considered by those in the MoE and school administrators when adopting and implementing the CEFR approach. Administrators should also promote the transparency of pedagogical reflection as the underlying assumption of the CEFR framework (2018). Overall, teacher educators involved in the teacher training programme need to first establish a mutual understanding of the adopted approach and its impact on their language instruction and, more importantly, language learners-users.

The findings also revealed that teachers were not concerned about their language competence to conduct an action-oriented lesson. This may be because they viewed themselves as a learning facilitator, not solely a teacher who performs communicative tasks. As highlighted in the framework, the CEFR sees learners as language users who have communicative tasks to accomplish (Council of Europe, 2018) and, as such, language teachers are no longer mainly knowledge providers, but rather knowledgeable interlocutors who can create a variety of communicative tasks for language users. This crucial point needs to be promoted in future teacher professional development programmes. In addition, language teachers can anticipate the target language for the proposed communicative situations and practice some useful language and instructions to guide their learners in engaging in communicative tasks. As evident in the findings, repetition of some key phrases or instructions in class could potentially assist teachers run their communicative class. Unlike previous findings highlighting the unsuccessful implementation of communication-based approach (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Kanchai, 2019; Kusiri, 2006; Nonthaisong, 2015; Thongsri, 2005), this may be because English teachers in the current study undertook the communication-based training before the actual implementation. Another possible reason was that Thai EFL teachers' current competency level, accounted as B1 and B2 for some, to some extent, resulted in the good command for conducting an action-oriented lesson. Thus, this issue of English competency level of Thai EFL teachers may be taken into teacher educators' consideration to set a minimum requirement of English language for primary and secondary school teachers.

Another substantial factor promoting the achievement of the action-oriented approach in EFL classrooms is the facilitative, top-down role of the administrator. Although the administrators are not involved in the actual classroom practice, they need to facilitate the policy-to-practice translation by providing necessary materials, reducing constraints, and adjusting the administrative direction to embrace the adopted action-oriented approach. Previous studies have also found that the implementation of the action-oriented approach can be hindered by physical constraints, including a lack of the clarity in the communication from the policy-related level to an instruction-related level, lack of communication-related training provision (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Kusiri, 2006; Nonthaisong, 2015; Thongsri, 2005), shortage of technology and materials (Sunyakul & Teo, 2020) and inconducive teaching and learning environments (Kulsiri, 2006; Thongsri, 2005). These physical constraints should be managed by the administrator prior to the implementation of the action-oriented instruction (Fulcher, 2010; McNamara & Roever, 2006; McNamara, 2011).

The solution to a long-term achievement of the action-oriented approach in EFL classrooms appears to be a pedagogical reflection. Indeed, the findings suggest that a collaborative pedagogical reflection should be implemented to assist EFL teachers reflect on their action-oriented practices so that the teachers become more confident in applying the action-oriented

approach and can promote students' communicative competence. Moreover, the findings also reveal how teachers develop pedagogical knowledge and skills via engaging in a collaborative pedagogical reflection, which can help them make appropriate instructional decisions. Such collaborative practices could function as a platform of constructive idea exchanges among EFL teachers and allow novice teachers to learn from more experienced teachers (Chien, 2014; Korkko et al., 2016; Makina, 2018; Parsons & Stepenson, 2005; Stenberg et al., 2016). Moreover, collaborative practice among teachers could reduce the gap between the pro-action-oriented approach and pro-conventional teaching approach teachers through the sharing of ideas. Collaborative practice may also improve teachers' self-efficacy in (re)designing action-oriented tasks and this may ensure that the action-oriented instruction is sustained, thus enhancing learners' linguistic and sociolinguistic skills to serve their communicative purposes.

The findings further suggest that pedagogical knowledge and innovation could lead to better management of mixed ability students in one cohort. Specifically, teachers need to execute their pedagogical knowledge and balance students-teachers' L1 and existing linguistic features in their contextualised communicative repertoire to make an action-oriented tasks accomplished. Indeed, the use of students' L1 could not be eliminated in communicative classrooms, and as such EFL teachers need to be aware of students' L1 use and come up with alternative strategies (e.g., repeating some key phrases, grading teachers' language in classroom, and even translating those L1 chunks into more simple English) to make their communicative tasks meaningful. This also underlies the purpose of the CEFR framework to embrace plural linguistic diversity (CoE, 2018). This may be challenging for language teachers, but a continued collaborative reflection will help develop pedagogical knowledge and deal with the language use in action-oriented classrooms.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The CEFR framework has been adopted in numerous countries across the world, including Thailand. However, more in-depth studies are required to provide a clearer picture of the implementation of the CEFR framework and, more importantly, its underlying action-oriented approach in classrooms (Kanchai, 2019; Phoolaikao & Sukying, 2021). The current findings have revealed three substantial implications. First, to promote effective policy-to-practice translation, communication, and a good understanding of the CEFR and action-oriented approach across stakeholders should be first taken into consideration. Without proper insights into the adopted framework and underlying action-oriented approach, the classroom practices cannot be achieved, and language teacher may remain ignorant to the policy. Tangible guidelines and concrete examples of action-oriented activities should therefore be provided. Best practices and lessons learnt from different pedagogical contexts with the emphasis on different skills could be used to accompany the top-down policy implementation. Another implication is that the school administrator needs to adjust their administrative roles to facilitate the action-oriented instruction in their pedagogical context. However, this should be based on an understanding of the CEFR framework to allow administrators to alter their administrative trajectory, determine the constraints and teachers' needs, and provide opportunities for language teachers to engage in collaborative pedagogical practice among teaching professionals. Collaborative pedagogical reflection should also be sustained. The findings revealed that this collaborative practice could potentially help language teachers reflect on their pedagogical action-oriented instruction, exchange pedagogical knowledge and practice among peers, bridge the gap between the pro-action-oriented approach

and those favouring the conventional method of teaching, and help build language teachers' self-efficacy through peer recognition. Moreover, importantly, the findings also illustrate that such collaborative practice could sustain the achievement of the action-oriented approach in EFL classroom as teachers feel confident in using the approach in their classrooms. As such, teacher trainers and educators should design courses to help language teachers apply their pedagogical knowledge and innovation to sustain their classroom-based practices (Loo et al., 2019; Triastuti, 2020).

Despite the meaningful new findings, the current study still contains some limitations. The current study involved only in-service EFL teachers who have undertaken the communication-based training, Boot Camp, and it might also be worth exploring those who never attended the training. This may provide a robustness to future research findings on how they could conduct their action-oriented lessons to address the top-down policy endorsed by the Ministry of Education. Regarding the current study's methodology, a mixed methods research design may provide rounded results to be further generalised to other similar contexts.

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APPENDIX

Semi-structured interview prompts

1. Could you please talk about Boot Camp you have participated in?
2. How have you applied the communicative activities from Boot Camp into your classroom?
3. What are the problems you have encountered when it comes to classroom application?
4. How have you done to those who never participated in Boot Camp?
5. How would you sustain communicative language teaching in your teaching context?
6. What would you say about this language framework policy?