

University Students' Perceptions of a CEFR-Based English Language Development System in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Background and Objectives: Since its introduction in 2001, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has served as a foundational framework guiding language education policy and pedagogy worldwide. In Thailand, the CEFR has been progressively integrated into English language policies and instructional practices across all educational levels. At the tertiary level, the Office of the Higher Education Commission mandates English proficiency testing for all university students, with many institutions employing CEFR-based standardized assessments as benchmarks for evaluating language competence. This study investigates third-year university students' perceptions of a CEFR-based English language development system after three years of implementation at a public university in Thailand.

Methodology: Employing a mixed-methods design, data were collected from 617 students across multiple faculties through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Results: The findings indicate that students held broadly positive perceptions of the system, particularly regarding its contributions to language improvement, perceived usefulness, and motivation. Teacher support emerged as a critical factor shaping students' learning experiences, while a preference for face-to-face instruction over the primarily online delivery mode was also evident.

Discussions: In terms of perceived usefulness, students identified numerous components of the system as beneficial to their language development. This perception can be attributed to the system's alignment with CEFR descriptors, which informed both the design of individual courses and the placement of students by proficiency levels. Such alignment enabled learners to perceive the content as relevant, appropriately challenging, and tailored to their needs. Students generally reported that their English proficiency improved through participation in the system, particularly through the foundational and remedial courses. This perception may stem from the fact that both the courses and their associated learning materials were systematically structured around specific CEFR proficiency levels. Additionally, students

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generally indicated that the English courses offered within the system encouraged them to continue developing their language skills. Although all components of the system were perceived as motivational, the supplementary (or extra) courses elicited the highest level of agreement among respondents. This can be because these courses were completely optional, and students elected to enrol only when they were genuinely interested. Students frequently reported that their instructors played a central role in fostering motivation and that the guidance and support they received contributed meaningfully to their language development. Although these accounts were inherently subjective, they underscore the pivotal role teachers can assume in both encouraging and sustaining learner engagement.

Conclusions: This study carries significant pedagogical implications for the design and implementation of CEFR-based language development systems. That is, it underscores the importance of balancing systematic CEFR alignment with opportunities for creative and contextually relevant course design to optimize both learner engagement and instructional effectiveness. This study focused exclusively on students' perceptions of the English language development system and did not evaluate its actual impact on language proficiency. To address this gap, future research should incorporate quasi-experimental or longitudinal designs, utilizing pre- and post-testing measures to assess the system's effectiveness in promoting measurable language gains.

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Introduction

Since its launch in 2001, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has been widely utilized as a core framework for informing language education policies and pedagogy globally (Nagai et al., 2020). The CEFR offers a structured framework for assessing language proficiency through its use of levels and descriptors, emphasizing practical language use in real-life contexts (Waluyo et al., 2024). Several Asian countries, including Japan (Negishi et al., 2013), Taiwan (Wu, J. R., & Wu, R. Y., 2007), and Vietnam (Nguyen, 2015), have localized and integrated the CEFR into their approaches to language education, encompassing instruction, learning, and assessment practices. In Thailand, the CEFR has been integrated into English language policies and instruction at all educational levels (Anantapol et al., 2018). At the tertiary level, the Office of the Higher Education Commission requires English proficiency testing for all university students, with many institutions adopting CEFR-based standardized assessments as benchmarks for evaluating language competence (Cheewasukthaworn, 2022). At the undergraduate level, these standardized assessments serve as gatekeepers for program entry, monitor academic progress,

and confirm proficiency before graduation (Wudthayagorn, 2021). From a pedagogical perspective, improving university students' English proficiency has remained a central objective within Thai higher education. In pursuit of this goal, numerous institutions have adopted the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a basis for refining instructional practices and promoting students' English language development (Hiranburana et al., 2018). These institutions have operated under the assumption that aligning language learning objectives, teaching materials, and assessment methods with the CEFR descriptors could effectively facilitate students' English language proficiency within their specific contexts (Hiranburana et al., 2018).

At our university, students' proficiency is classified into five CEFR levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, and C1, based on their performance in the Silpakorn Test of English Proficiency (STEP) (Sridhanyarat et al., 2021). The university has established a B2 proficiency level as the graduation requirement. To support this goal, a comprehensive system was implemented to strengthen students' competencies across the four core English language skills. Taking an ecological approach, the system supports the students by offering English language courses (both required and elective), online language learning programs, self-paced language courses, remedial courses, and special English language courses.

Previous research on English language development among Thai university students has predominantly concentrated on assessing the efficacy of instructional tools and their implementation within classroom contexts. With regard to the CEFR, most studies have focused on students' perceptions and experiences. For example, Namfah (2022) investigated student teachers' perceptions of CEFR-based English proficiency tests in Thailand. The results indicated that their knowledge of the CEFR descriptors and criteria was limited. Similarly, Ngonkum and Deerajviset (2024) examined Thai university students' English language learning experiences and their perceptions of the CEFR. The findings revealed that most students rated their English proficiency at the A1 level and demonstrated a moderate level of awareness of the CEFR. Students with lower proficiency levels expressed a primary interest in developing their speaking and listening skills, whereas those with higher proficiency tended to focus more on improving their reading and writing skills. However, there is a notable scarcity of studies examining comprehensive English language development systems grounded in the CEFR. Specifically, there is a lack of research investigating the effectiveness of English language development systems that are systematically designed based on the CEFR. In this regard, examining students' perceptions constitutes a crucial dimension of evaluating such a system. Exploring learners' perceived usefulness, language improvement, and motivation can provide valuable insights into how this English language development system functions in practice and whether it meaningfully supports students' language development. In response to this gap, the present study seeks to explore students' perceptions of a CEFR-based English language development system after having been in the system for three years. This study is guided by one primary research question:

1. What are the students' perceptions of a CEFR-based English language development system at a university in Thailand?

Review of Literature

CEFR in Thailand

In both European and international contexts, the application of the CEFR in higher education English language assessments has largely centered on measuring students' proficiency levels for entry or admission-related decisions (Deygers et al., 2018; Piccardo, 2020). In Thailand, the Ministry of Education has officially integrated the CEFR into its national education reform efforts, aligning it with the pedagogical principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to improve students' communicative competence in English. The CEFR proficiency scale (A1-C2) is employed as a framework for setting expected learning outcomes at different educational levels. Specifically, A1 is designated as the exit level for primary education, A2 as the target for lower secondary education, and B1 as the proficiency benchmark for upper secondary and vocational education students (Kanchai, 2019; Wudthayagorn, 2021).

At the tertiary level, the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) has enacted national language policy measures to unify English language instruction across universities. As a result, higher education institutions in Thailand are mandated to formulate language policies consistent with the CEFR and to revise their English curricula so that course outcomes align with the proficiency descriptors established by the framework (Kanchai, 2019). Universities are additionally encouraged to introduce supportive initiatives (e.g., workshops, professional development schemes, and extracurricular programs) that foster active engagement with the English language. Furthermore, institutions are required to conduct placement or proficiency assessments, or to recognize equivalent standardized tests (e.g., IELTS, TOEFL, and TOEIC), as part of comprehensive strategies aimed at strengthening students' English language proficiency. The CEFR has been adopted as the standard reference for university English exit exams in Thailand, with B2 set as the minimum requirement for non-English majors at many public institutions and C1 mandated for English majors by the Ministry of Education (Wudthayagorn, 2021).

Silpakorn English Language Development System

In response to OHEC policy, the university implemented a CEFR-based English language development system to guide curriculum design, pedagogy, and learning outcomes. Aimed at supporting students in reaching B2 proficiency by graduation and enhancing their language skills throughout their studies, the system includes six key components: general English courses, ESP courses, language learning software, online modules, supplementary workshops, and remedial instruction. The structure of the system is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1

The English Language Development System at the University

Components	Course Details, Learning Activities, and Resources	Target CEFR Levels	Learning Period	Status
General English Courses	<i>English in the Digital Era</i> -Localized course books developed based on B1 CEFR descriptions	B1	Year 1	Required for A2 students

Table 1*(Cont.)*

Components	Course Details, Learning Activities, and Resources	Target CEFR Levels	Learning Period	Status
	-Four-skills development -Assessment rubrics designed based on B1 CEFR descriptions			(based on STEP scores)
	<i>English for International Communication</i> -Localized course books developed based on B2 CEFR descriptions -Four-skills development -Assessment rubrics designed based on B2 CEFR descriptions	B2	Year 1	Required for B1 students (based on STEP scores)
ESP Courses	ESP courses tailored to students from different disciplines -Commercialized textbooks based on the intended CEFR level	B1	Year 2	Required for all students
Language Learning Software	Self-access language learning software -Students can practice English according to their CEFR levels -Practice exercises and automated feedback for improvement -Learner dashboard for monitoring progress	A2-C1	Years 1-4	Optional for all students
Online Writing Course	Online academic writing course -Self-paced online course -Basic grammar for writing -Different types of paragraph writing -Practice exercises with model answers	A2-B2	Years 1-4	Optional for all students
Supplementary Courses	English courses focusing on various topics such as TOEIC and IELTS preparation, pronunciation, intercultural communication, creative writing, public speaking, and English for various professions -Synchronous evening online courses with recommended CEFR levels -Weekend face-to-face workshops -Students can register for the courses as frequently as they wish. -15-20 courses offered per semester	A2-B2	Years 1-4	Optional for all students

Table 1

(Cont.)

Components	Course Details, Learning Activities, and Resources	Target CEFR Levels	Learning Period	Status
Remedial Courses	<i>Waystage English</i> (remedial course for A1 students) <i>Threshold English</i> (remedial course for A2 students) <i>Vantage English</i> (remedial course for B1 students) -Localized course books developed based on A2 CEFR descriptions -Four-skills development -Assessment rubrics designed based on A2-B2 CEFR descriptions -Students take 1-3 remedial courses depending on their starting level.	A1-B1	Years 3-4	Required for A1, A2, and B1 students who have not reached B2 level in the third year

The general English courses (i.e., *English in the Digital Era* (B1) and *English for International Communication* (B2)) are structured around CEFR levels, targeting all four-language-skills and assessed using level-specific rubrics. The English Language Development Center develops course books and materials internally, referencing CEFR descriptors. ESP courses are tailored to each faculty's needs, with faculties independently selecting relevant materials. For digital learning, the university provides access to Speexx, a CEFR-based language learning platform and a self-paced online writing course, offering foundational academic writing instruction. Students gain full access to these resources upon enrollment in general English courses and can engage with them throughout their studies.

Supplementary courses provide students with optional, interest-based English learning opportunities on diverse themes such as careers, public speaking, test preparation, sports, music, cooking, and digital content creation. Each course is linked to a recommended CEFR level and is scheduled during evenings or weekends. In contrast, remedial courses are mandatory for third-year students who do not meet the B2 threshold on the STEP test. These courses are aligned with CEFR levels (A2-B2) and use in-house materials developed by the English Language Development Center based on the CEFR descriptors. For example, at the B1 level in oral production, students are expected to clearly express their feelings about personal experiences and provide reasons to explain them. They should also be able to describe events, whether real or imagined. In this study, the Silpakorn English Language Development System is conceptualized as a framework that categorizes students into different proficiency levels based on the CEFR. The localized STEP test functions both as a placement test and an exit examination to assign students to appropriate proficiency levels. Students' English proficiency is developed through various courses and workshops, which serve as key developmental tools throughout their university studies. In this study, students' perceptions refer to learners' evaluations and interpretations of the CEFR-based English language development system after engaging with it

over a sustained period. These perceptions include students' views on the system's perceived usefulness, its contribution to their English language improvement, and its influence on their learning motivation. As such, students' perceptions are considered a critical dimension in evaluating the effectiveness of the system as they reflect learners' direct experiences and provide insights into how the system operates in practice and supports language development.

Related Studies

Due to its extensive adoption, the CEFR has been examined through multiple lenses, ranging from policy implementation to classroom practice, across diverse educational contexts. While initial research predominantly explored teachers' views on the CEFR, more recent studies have turned attention to students' perceptions and experiences related to the framework. Namfah (2022) examined student teachers' perceptions of CEFR-based English proficiency tests in Thailand. Questionnaire findings indicated that while participants were aware of the existence of such assessments, their understanding of the CEFR's descriptors and criteria remained limited. Similarly, Phoolaikao and Sukying (2021) carried out a study examining the understanding of the CEFR among preservice English teachers in Thailand. The results showed that they had a relatively high level of knowledge related to assessment and the Common Reference Levels, while their understanding of the learning and teaching approach was less pronounced, suggesting an incomplete understanding of the framework.

In addition, Bunching et al. (2021) explored students' perceptions and opinions about the importance and accessibility of a CEFR-based language education policy in improving students' English proficiency at a university in Thailand. The findings revealed that students had a strong understanding of the university language policy and were clearly aware of how CEFR levels corresponded to their own English proficiency. Moreover, students perceived the policy implementation as highly effective and viewed the training project as beneficial, as its content aligned closely with their expectations and needs. The CEFR was also recognized by students as a valuable framework for assessing English proficiency. More recently, Ngonkum and Deerajviset (2024) investigated how Thai university students engaged with and perceived the CEFR in relation to their English language learning experiences. The findings revealed that students generally assessed their English proficiency at the A1 level and exhibited a moderate level of awareness of the CEFR. It was also found that students with lower proficiency levels expressed a primary interest in developing their oral and aural skills, whereas those with higher proficiency tended to focus on enhancing their reading and writing abilities. Importantly, the students emphasized the need for more robust institutional support and clearer pedagogical direction regarding the implementation of the CEFR within their academic programs.

As shown in previous research, while studies looking at students' perceptions of the CEFR do exist, they tend to focus on the students' understanding of policy, awareness of the CEFR, and knowledge related to different aspects of the framework. There is a clear need for empirical research examining the implementation of the CEFR as a comprehensive language development framework, as well as students' perceptions of their learning experiences within this context. In particular, for policymakers and university administrators to better understand whether and how the CEFR functions in practice, students' perceptions and experiences related to its usefulness and effectiveness for their language development need to be examined. The current study addresses this need.

Research Methods

Research Contexts and Participants

The university has established a graduation requirement stipulating that students must reach a B2 level of English proficiency. To support this goal, a comprehensive system was implemented to enhance students' competencies across the four core language skills. The system facilitates student progress by providing a range of English language learning opportunities, including mandatory and elective courses, online learning platforms, self-directed language modules, remedial instruction, and supplementary learning activities.

The participants were third-year students from a public university in Thailand. It is important to note that not all students at the university were automatically recruited. There were three inclusion criteria the study applied.

1. The students needed to have completed two Fundamental English courses (*English in the Digital Era* and *English for International Communication*)

2. The students needed to have taken at least one extra English language course and one remedial course.

3. The students needed to have used online learning resources (Speexx and online writing course) provided by the university.

A total of 617 students from all faculties across the university agreed to participate in the study. The students' language proficiency ranged from A1 to B1 and was assessed using the Silpakorn Test of English Proficiency (STEP). Table 2 presents the students' demographic data.

Table 2

Demographic Information of the Participants

Faculty	F	%	Gender	F	%	English Proficiency	F	%
Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts	8	1.30						
Architecture	8	1.30						
Archaeology	16	2.60						
Decorative Arts	32	5.17						
Arts	47	7.62	Male	243	39.38	A1	52	8.43
Education	35	5.67	Female	374	60.28	A2	387	62.72
Science	107	17.34				B1	178	28.85
Music	18	2.92						
Engineering and Industrial Technology	166	26.90						
Management Science	145	23.50						
ICT	14	2.27						
Animal Sciences and Agricultural Technology	16	2.60						
International College	5	0.81						

Research Design and Instruments

Adopting a mixed-methods research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), two sets of data, quantitative and qualitative, were collected through two instruments: a questionnaire and an interview. The perception questionnaire consists of 18 five-point Likert scale items in four categories: the effectiveness of the system, perceived usefulness, motivation, and learning experience (see the Results section). Four open-ended questions were also included to gain deeper insights into students' perceptions (see Appendix A). The perception scale was developed based on different aspects of language learning associated with the CEFR in the literature. The internal consistency of each subscale was assessed through Cronbach's alpha. The alpha coefficients were 0.85 for effectiveness, 0.9 for usefulness, 0.86 for motivation, and 0.9 for learning experience, suggesting internal consistency across all four subscales. The interview questions were developed to gain more insights into students' learning experience in the CEFR-based English development system. To ensure the content validity of the questionnaire and interview questions, they were subjected to an item objective congruence (IOC) evaluation by three experts specializing in the CEFR and English language teaching. The analysis produced an IOC value of 0.935, indicating a satisfactory level of validity.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection took place between May and October 2024. The questionnaires were administered after the students had completed the English remedial courses at the end of their third year. These questionnaires were disseminated online via Google Forms. Six hundred and seventeen (617) students completed the questionnaires, and the completion process took approximately 10 to 15 minutes. Responses to the Likert-scale items were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.0, with descriptive statistics, including frequency, mean scores, and standard deviations, calculated to summarize the data. The open-ended responses were deductively coded according to four predefined categories: the effectiveness of the system, perceived usefulness, motivation, and learning experience. Responses that did not align with these categories were coded inductively into emerging themes. To enhance the reliability of the coding process, the first author conducted the initial coding, while 50% of the responses were independently coded by an English lecturer at a university in Thailand as part of a dual-coding procedure.

Fifteen participants were invited to take part in an interview, selected based on their questionnaire responses. To achieve a degree of sample representativeness, participants were purposively selected to include individuals who expressed positive, neutral, and moderately negative perceptions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis using the Zoom platform. While responses were elicited based on the interview questions, the participants were also encouraged to discuss any additional issues they considered relevant to the study. To reduce the potential for miscommunication or misunderstanding, all interviews were conducted in Thai. The researchers transcribed the interviews and later translated them into English for analysis. To ensure the validity and accuracy of the translations, the transcripts underwent a back-translation process conducted by two English instructors from the General Education Administration and English Language Development Center at the university. Consistent with the analysis of open-ended questionnaire responses, interview data were deductively coded based on the four predefined categories. To strengthen the reliability of the coding process, the initial coding was performed by the researchers, while 50% of the interview

data were independently coded by an English lecturer at the university, employing a dual-coding approach.

Ethical Considerations

Because this study involved using students' responses, it was paramount to ensure that ethical issues were dealt with appropriately. Ethics approval was granted by Silpakorn University Research Committee prior to the start of the study. All students were asked to sign a digital consent form before they responded to the questionnaire and participated in the semi-structured interview. They were informed that their decision whether or not to participate in the research would not in any way affect their current studies at the university and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. To maintain confidentiality, only the research team had access to the data, and all student information was anonymized through the use of pseudonyms in data records.

Findings

The Students' Perceptions of the CEFR-Based English Development System

This section explores students' perceptions of the CEFR-based English development system. The analysis was structured around four key dimensions: effectiveness of the system, perceived usefulness, motivation, and learning experience.

Table 3

Students' Perceptions of the Usefulness of the System

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	STD
Q1	F	1	13	85	306	212	4.16	.745
	Percentage	0.16	2.11	13.78	49.59	34.36		
Q2	F	1	6	125	323	162	4.04	.719
	Percentage	0.16	0.97	20.26	52.35	26.26		
Q3	F	5	8	116	318	170	4.04	.766
	Percentage	0.81	1.30	18.80	51.54	27.55		
Q4	F	1	9	114	306	187	4.08	.744
	Percentage	0.16	1.46	18.48	49.59	30.31		
Q5	F	2	1	112	351	151	4.05	.678
	Percentage	0.32	0.16	18.15	56.89	24.47		

Notes. F = frequency, SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, N = neither agree nor disagree, A = agree, SA = strongly agree, STD = standard deviation

Q1: The English in the Digital Era course was useful for improving my English skills.

Q2: The English for International Communication course was useful for improving my English skills.

Q3: The extra courses I took were beneficial for my English skills.

Q4: The remedial courses I took were beneficial for my English skills.

Q5: The online learning resources were useful for improving my English.

Students' perceptions of the usefulness of the English language development system were assessed through five questionnaire items. Overall, responses indicated a strong consensus regarding the system's utility in supporting English language acquisition. A considerable majority considered the foundational courses, *English in the Digital Era* (83.95%) and *English for International Communication* (78.61%) to be instrumental in facilitating their linguistic development. Likewise, approximately four-fifths of respondents affirmed the value of both supplementary courses (79.09%) and remedial classes (79.90%) in enhancing their English proficiency. Furthermore, digital learning resources were viewed favorably, with 81.36% of students recognizing them as effective tools for language improvement. These findings underscore the multidimensional contribution of the system's components to students' overall language learning experience.

The qualitative data drawn from both the open-ended questionnaire responses and semi-structured interviews corroborate the quantitative findings, further affirming the perceived value of the English courses in supporting students' language development. Numerous participants articulated that the two foundational courses were particularly advantageous, serving as a crucial bridge during their transition into university-level academic study. As one respondent remarked:

I think SU201 and SU202 were very useful for me in improving my English skills. The course provided me with opportunities to develop my listening and speaking skills through the activities in the course. This gave me a good foundation to study my major subjects in English. Also, it prepared me for university studies, which was different from high school (Interview, Student 14).

In addition to the foundational courses, several students highlighted the value of both the remedial and supplementary English courses in fostering their language development. These components were viewed as offering targeted support and opportunities for further practice beyond the core curriculum. As one student noted:

The remedial courses (ENG102 and ENG103) were useful and friendly for students who were not very good at English. The course was designed to offer step-by-step learning for students and frequent review activities so that students who were not good at English like me could understand better. I also think that the extra English courses were useful. The topics were relevant to my field of study and the teacher was very attentive to the students. The variety of the topics offered in these courses allowed students who were from different majors to choose what they wanted to study and what is most useful for them (Interview, Student 27).

Table 4
Students' Perceptions of Language Improvement

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	STD
Q6	F	0	9	115	308	185	4.08	.733
	Percentage	0.0	1.46	18.64	49.92	29.98		
Q7	F	0	11	141	319	146	3.97	.732
	Percentage	0.0	1.78	22.85	51.70	23.66		
Q8	F	5	11	190	308	103	3.79	.761
	Percentage	0.81	1.78	30.79	49.92	16.69		

Table 4

(Cont.)

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	STD
Q9	F	2	10	111	278	216	4.12	.780
	Percentage	0.32	1.62	17.99	45.06	35.01		
Q10	F	5	14	134	342	122	3.91	.756
	Percentage	0.81	2.27	21.72	55.43	19.77		

Notes. F = frequency, SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, N = neither agree nor disagree, A = agree, SA = strongly agree, STD = standard deviation

Q6: My English proficiency improved as a result of my participation in the English in the Digital Era course.

Q7: My English proficiency improved as a result of my participation in the English for International Communication course.

Q8: My English proficiency showed improvement as a direct outcome of my participation in the extra courses.

Q9: I have acquired knowledge and skills through remedial courses, which helped my English proficiency.

Q10: My English proficiency showed improvement as a result of my engagement with online learning courses.

Five questionnaire items were employed to investigate students' perceptions of their language improvement as influenced by their participation in the English language development system. As indicated in Table 4, students perceived the system as conducive to enhancing their English proficiency. Notably, 79.90% of respondents reported that the course *English in the Digital Era* had positively impacted their language skills, while 75.36% expressed a similar view regarding *English for International Communication*. In relation to digital learning tools and remedial instruction, 74.60% and 80.07% of students, respectively, acknowledged tangible gains in their English development. By contrast, perceptions of the supplementary language courses were somewhat more reserved, with 66.61% of participants identifying them as beneficial, a figure that, while still a majority, indicates relatively lower perceived efficacy compared to other components of the system. These results suggest that while the overall system is regarded as advantageous, certain elements may vary in their perceived impact on learners' progress.

The qualitative findings, which were drawn from both interview transcripts and open-ended questionnaire responses, reinforce the view that participation in the English language development system contributed meaningfully to students' perceived improvement in language proficiency. Notably, a considerable number of students attributed substantial gains in their English abilities to the remedial courses provided by the system. As one participant reflected:

After studying in the Vantage English course (one of the remedial courses), I felt that my skills improved significantly, especially in terms of how I organized my thoughts in writing and speaking. I learned how to better structure my speech and my writing. The teacher was also very supportive and her feedback helped me develop my skills (Interview, Student 32).

Nevertheless, despite expressing overall satisfaction with the courses, some students indicated that the limited duration of the supplementary courses constrained their ability to make sustained progress in language development. As one student mentioned:

I really enjoyed learning in the extra courses because the teacher was very good, and the content of the course was very interesting. But I think the course (3 weeks) was too short for me to develop my English skills. I mean it was a good starting point, but I would have liked to have a longer time to study (Interview, Student 32).

Table 5

Students' Perceptions of Motivation to Improve Their English

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	STD
Q11	F	2	14	135	303	163	3.99	.777
	Percentage	0.32	2.27	21.88	49.11	26.42		
Q12	F	1	13	135	285	183	4.03	.783
	Percentage	0.16	2.11	21.88	46.19	29.66		
Q13	F	1	10	108	247	251	4.19	.790
	Percentage	0.16	1.62	17.50	40.03	40.68		
Q14	F	2	13	162	322	118	3.87	.743
	Percentage	0.32	2.11	26.26	52.19	19.12		
Q15	F	5	11	166	316	119	3.86	.767
	Percentage	0.81	1.78	26.90	51.22	19.29		

Notes. F = frequency, SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, N = neither agree nor disagree, A = agree, SA = strongly agree, STD = standard deviation

Q11: The English in the Digital Era course motivated me to improve my English skills.

Q12: The English for International Communication course motivated me to improve my English skills.

Q13: The extra courses I took motivated me to improve my English skills.

Q14: After enrolling in remedial courses, I was motivated to improve my English skills.

Q15: The online learning materials have motivated me to improve my English skills.

To investigate the role of motivation in students' engagement with the English language development system, five questionnaire items were administered. The descriptive data indicated that a substantial proportion of participants perceived the two core courses, *English in the Digital Era*, and *English for International Communication*, as instrumental in enhancing their motivation to improve language proficiency, with 75.53% and 75.85% agreement rates, respectively. Notably, an even larger majority (80.71%) affirmed that participation in supplementary English courses served as a significant motivational driver for language development. Additionally, similar levels of perceived motivational impact were reported in relation to both remedial English courses and the use of online learning resources, further underscoring the system's multifaceted influence on learners' motivation to advance their English skills.

The qualitative evidence further substantiates the quantitative findings by illustrating how the courses within the language development system served as a motivational catalyst for continued English language learning. In particular, several students emphasized that the supplementary courses, especially those aligned with their prospective career paths, were a significant source of motivation, prompting them to enhance their language proficiency with greater purpose. As one student articulated:

When I took the extra course related to English for airline business, I learned a lot about the industry and the skills I needed to become a flight attendant. This prompted me to have motivation to improve my English skills so that when I graduate, I will be ready to apply for the job. (Interview, Student 87).

While the prevailing view suggested that the courses within the system were effective in motivating students to advance their English skills, a number of participants expressed a preference for face-to-face instruction over fully online delivery. They believed that in-person engagement would have further enriched their learning experience. As one student reflected:

I think the remedial courses I took made me want to improve my English more. The activities were engaging, and the teachers were great at motivating students to learn English. However, as the course was online, I felt that the lack of face-to-face interaction not only with the teacher, but also with peers might have made some students lose their interest. I think the classes will be better if they are delivered on-site (Interview, Student 118).

Table 6

Students' Perceptions of Learning Experiences

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	STD
Q16	F	2	9	138	283	185	4.04	.781
	Percentage	0.32	1.46	22.37	45.87	29.98		
Q17	F	2	9	143	287	176	4.01	.778
	Percentage	0.32	1.46	23.18	46.52	28.53		
Q18	F	2	7	113	294	201	4.11	.756
	Percentage	0.32	1.13	18.31	47.65	32.58		

Notes. F = frequency, SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, N = neither agree nor disagree, A = agree, SA = strongly agree, STD = standard deviation.

Q16: I enjoyed learning in different courses in the system.

Q17: I had a good experience learning in the English language development system.

Q18: I liked the variety of courses offered by the system.

Three questionnaire items were designed to elicit students' perceptions of their learning experiences within the English language development system. The responses reflected a generally positive evaluation of the system. A significant majority (80.23%) expressed appreciation for the diverse array of courses available, while 75.85% indicated that they enjoyed engaging with different courses over the duration of their participation. Moreover, a similar

proportion of the students reported a favorable overall experience in learning English through the system, suggesting its broad effectiveness in fostering a supportive and engaging learning environment.

The qualitative data corroborated the quantitative findings, reinforcing the conclusion that students generally had a positive learning experience within the English language development system. One participant in particular, attributed her enjoyment to both the breadth of course offerings and the flexibility afforded by the online delivery format:

I really enjoyed learning in different courses offered by the university. All of the topics were interesting. I also liked the fact that the course was online as I could study from anywhere. During semester breaks, I went back to my hometown, so having the online class gave me the opportunity to keep learning although I was not at the university. I really liked this. (Open-ended response, Student 225).

In sum, the findings presented above indicate that students largely perceived their engagement with the English language development system as both beneficial and instrumental in advancing their language proficiency. The perceived relevance of course content, particularly its alignment with students' academic and professional aspirations, emerged as a key motivational driver for sustained language learning. Although preferences regarding the mode of instructional delivery varied, students consistently reported a broadly positive experience in their participation in the system.

Emerging Themes

This section presents the thematic findings derived from the qualitative data. Two primary themes were identified: (1) the perceived influence of language instructors in the learning process, and (2) students' experiences and preferences regarding online versus face-to-face modes of instruction.

The Perceived Influence of Language Instructors in the Learning Process

A recurring theme that emerged from the qualitative data was the pivotal role of language instructors in shaping students' learning experiences within the system. Most notably, students attributed a significant part of their language improvement to the guidance and support provided by their teachers across various courses. Numerous participants highlighted the attentiveness and sustained encouragement they received, noting that instructors were consistently responsive to their academic needs, not only in facilitating language development but also in offering broader learning support. As one student remarked during the interview:

My teacher in the Vantage English course (one of the remedial courses) was very attentive and supportive of my learning. She paid attention to the details of every student and offered personalized support to everyone. This helped me know what I needed to do to improve my English skills. (Interview, Student 135).

In addition, several students emphasized the motivational role played by their instructors, noting that teachers were instrumental not only in encouraging them to engage with English more actively but also in fostering an awareness of the long-term value of strong English language skills. The influence of teachers extended beyond classroom instruction, shaping students' attitudes toward language learning and its relevance to their future aspirations. As illustrated by the reflections of two participants:

My teacher was very good. She created an interesting and engaging learning atmosphere, so I really enjoyed learning in her class. I personally think that teachers play a very important role in determining whether students will be motivated to learn or not (Interview, Student 87).

The teacher in my course stressed the importance of English in the job market in the future. She also mentioned that English was used as an international language and was important both for my future career and daily use. This encouraged me to have more motivation to improve my English (Interview, Student 14).

Overall, the findings suggest that language teachers played a pivotal role in shaping students' perceptions of their own language development and in sustaining their motivation to improve their English proficiency.

Students' Experiences Regarding Online Versus Face-to-Face Modes of Instruction

Another salient theme emerging from the data concerned students' perceptions of the advantages and limitations associated with the fully online mode of instruction. It is important to note that all components of the English language development system, including the core, remedial, and supplementary courses, were delivered synchronously online, with only occasional in-person workshops for practical application. Students expressed divergent views regarding this mode of delivery. Some students liked the flexibility and accessibility it afforded, enabling them to engage with course content irrespective of time and place, as one student stated:

I think online classes were very convenient for me as it saved a lot of travelling time and I could study from anywhere. More importantly, there were a lot of courses offered during the semester break and I and many of my friends had to go back to our hometown, so having the online classes allowed us to study what we were interested in while being away from the university (Open-ended response, Student 18).

Despite the anytime/anywhere access online classes offered, many students articulated a clear preference for face-to-face instruction. Their rationale centered primarily on the richer opportunities for interpersonal interaction, both with peers and instructors, which they felt were limited in the virtual environment.

I want to study face-to-face at the university more because I think it will be more effective to practice English with friends in a real classroom. Teachers may be able to explain things in more detail in a face-to-face environment. Also, sometimes, online learning can be quite boring. (Open-ended response, Student 18).

In sum, students conveyed nuanced perspectives on their online learning experiences. While several appreciated the accessibility and flexibility inherent in virtual instruction, a substantial number felt that their overall learning experience would be significantly enhanced by increased opportunities for real-time interaction with instructors and other students.

Discussion

Overall, students reported favorable perceptions of the CEFR-based English language development system, regarding it as both beneficial and effective in enhancing their language proficiency. Moreover, various components of the system were seen as instrumental in fostering motivation to further develop their English skills. In addition to these perceptions, students underscored the influential role of their instructors in shaping both their motivation to learn English and their overall language development. They frequently cited the instructional support provided by teachers as a key contributor to their progress. Nonetheless, while acknowledging the advantages of online learning, particularly its flexibility, many students expressed a clear preference for face-to-face instruction, emphasizing a desire for more meaningful interaction with both teachers and peers.

In terms of perceived usefulness, students identified numerous components of the system as beneficial to their language development. This perception can be attributed to the system's alignment with CEFR descriptors, which informed both the design of individual courses and the placement of students according to their proficiency levels. Such alignment enabled learners to perceive the course content as relevant, appropriately challenging, and tailored to their developmental needs. These findings are consistent with previous research on CEFR implementation, which similarly reported that students regarded CEFR-based training as advantageous due to its close correspondence with their language proficiency, personal expectations, and learning goals (Bunching et al., 2021). From a theoretical standpoint, perceived usefulness plays a pivotal role in fostering motivation and learner engagement within language learning contexts. When students regard a language development system as effective in advancing their proficiency, they are more inclined to engage consistently and invest effort in meaningful language practice (Liaw & Huang, 2013). Furthermore, perceptions of usefulness have been positively linked to heightened self-efficacy and confidence. When learners believe that the courses offered within the system meaningfully support the acquisition and application of English skills, their confidence in their language learning capabilities tends to increase. This can, in turn, enrich their overall learning experience and contribute to sustained progress in the target language (Chen et al., 2019).

With regard to perceived language improvement, students generally reported that their perceived English proficiency had improved as a result of their participation in the system, particularly through the foundational and remedial courses. This perception may be attributed to the fact that both the courses and their associated learning materials were systematically

structured around specific CEFR proficiency levels (e.g., *Waystage English* for A1 learners progressing toward A2, *Threshold English* for A2 learners advancing toward B1, and *Vantage English* for B1 learners progressing to B2). Such level-appropriate design likely enabled students to recognize incremental progress in their language abilities throughout the duration of their engagement with the system. This favorable perception underscores the significance of adopting the CEFR as a comprehensive framework (O’Sullivan, 2021) that holistically aligns curriculum design, instructional delivery, and assessment practices, rather than emphasizing assessment in isolation, a tendency that has historically characterized many Thai higher education contexts. In addition, the finding that students perceived the supplementary (or extra) courses as having comparatively less impact on their perceived language improvement is perhaps unsurprising. Given that these courses were typically brief in duration (10-20 hours) and largely topic-specific in nature, focusing on areas such as airline business or public speaking, students may have felt that the primary emphasis was on acquiring subject-related knowledge rather than fostering substantive language development. To enhance the effectiveness of supplementary courses, it is recommended that their duration be extended and that they be more closely integrated with core courses. Such alignment may help reinforce learning and improve overall student outcomes.

With respect to motivation, students generally indicated that the English courses offered within the system encouraged them to continue developing their language skills. Although all components of the system were perceived as motivational, the supplementary (or extra) courses elicited the highest level of agreement among respondents. This may be because these courses were completely optional, and students elected to enroll only when they were genuinely interested. In particular, the content of these courses tended to be both creative and closely aligned with students’ personal interests and career aspirations (e.g., *English for Influencers*, *English for Airline Business*, and *Creative Pitching*). The innovative design of these offerings, coupled with their relevance to students’ goals, likely served as a key factor in sustaining motivation. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), the voluntary nature of these courses may have supported students’ sense of autonomy, while their relevance to personal and professional goals may have enhanced perceived competence and relatedness, thereby fostering more self-determined forms of motivation. This further suggests that students recognized the intrinsic value of enrolling in these courses, a perception that may have contributed to heightened motivation (Jitpaisarnwattana, 2024; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Fundamentally, motivation remains a critical determinant of successful language acquisition (Fakeye, 2010; Gardner, 2007).

Another noteworthy finding to emerge from the data was the significant influence of teachers on multiple dimensions of students’ perceptions. Students frequently reported that their instructors played a central role in fostering motivation and that the guidance and support they received contributed meaningfully to their language development. Although these accounts were inherently subjective, they underscore the pivotal role teachers can assume in both encouraging and sustaining learner engagement. These findings, while based on perceptions, are consistent with prior research demonstrating that strong teacher support can enhance both language acquisition and learner motivation (Huang et al., 2024; Lena et al., 2024). Finally, the students who were interviewed showed a tendency to prefer face-to-face instruction over online instruction. As one student stated, “I want to study face-to-face at the university more because I think it will be more effective to practice English with friends in a real classroom. Teachers may

be able to explain things in more detail in a face-to-face environment. Also, sometimes, online learning can be quite boring.” This is understandable given that language practice is likely more effective and meaningful in face-to-face settings (Jitpaisarnwattana et al., 2021). Looking at this against the backdrop of online learning during and after COVID-19, the social element of the language classroom might be as important as, if not more important than the content of the course itself. This affirms many previous studies on online language learning experiences, which found that although online learning was effective, real interaction with peers and teachers was irreplaceable (Huh et al., 2022).

Implications

Several pedagogical and design implications can be drawn from the findings of this study. From a course design standpoint, the findings highlight the importance of aligning each language course and its related learning activities with clearly specified CEFR proficiency levels, both in terms of course specifications and instructional materials. Within the system examined, each course was explicitly linked to a particular CEFR level, with locally developed materials carefully constructed in accordance with CEFR descriptors to ensure relevance and appropriate progression. For institutions seeking to implement a similar system, establishing CEFR alignment should remain a core principle in the course design process. At the same time, such alignment should be balanced with a degree of flexibility and pedagogical creativity. Importantly, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is underpinned by an action-oriented approach, which conceptualizes learners as social agents who use language to accomplish meaningful tasks in real-world contexts. Accordingly, course design should move beyond static level alignment to incorporate task-based, purposeful activities that reflect authentic language use and promote learner agency. Evidence from students’ perceptions of the supplementary courses suggests that participation in these offerings meaningfully contributed to both their motivation and overall learning experience. In the system under investigation, the incorporation of innovative and topic-specific course content such as creative or career-oriented modules was met with particularly positive responses, especially with respect to learner motivation. Consequently, future implementations are encouraged to integrate “creative” course content within a CEFR-based framework to balance structural consistency with engagement-driven innovation.

From a pedagogical standpoint, students repeatedly highlighted the pivotal role of teachers in shaping their perceptions of both language improvement and motivation. This underscores the necessity of providing systematic and ongoing teacher training prior to, and at regular intervals during, their engagement with the system. Such training should encompass a comprehensive understanding of CEFR implementation (O’Sullivan, 2021), equipping instructors with the requisite knowledge to effectively plan instruction, deliver lessons, and assess learners at specific CEFR levels. Particular emphasis should be placed on strategies for offering targeted guidance and support that align with the developmental needs of students at each proficiency level. While acknowledging individual differences in teaching style and persona, it is essential that instructors receive training in a range of motivational strategies to employ in their classrooms. Given the pivotal role of teachers in fostering students’ motivation to learn English, as highlighted in this study, equipping educators with diverse motivational approaches is critical for maximizing learner engagement and sustaining language development.

In response to students' expressed preference for face-to-face instruction, the adoption of a structured blended learning model may offer an effective compromise. Within such an approach, course components that are more receptive in nature could remain online, while sessions requiring greater interaction and collaboration could be conducted in person, thereby facilitating more meaningful engagement with both instructors and peers. From an administrative standpoint, this model also addresses practical constraints such as classroom availability and teacher recruitment, which would pose significant challenges under a fully face-to-face format. Consequently, a carefully designed blended approach represents a potential "sweet spot" for implementing a language development system of this scale, balancing pedagogical effectiveness with operational feasibility. This approach may also offer valuable insights for policymakers and educators.

Conclusion

Given the exploratory nature of this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted within a single institutional context, involving a relatively homogeneous cohort of Thai university students. As such, the extent to which the findings can be generalized to broader populations or diverse educational environments remains limited. To enhance the external validity of future research, it would be valuable to conduct similar investigations across varied institutional settings and with more heterogeneous learner profiles. Additionally, this study focused exclusively on students' perceptions of the English language development system and did not evaluate its actual impact on language proficiency. To address this gap, future research should incorporate quasi-experimental or longitudinal designs, utilizing pre- and post-testing measures to assess the system's effectiveness in promoting measurable language gains. This study did not examine potential variations in students' perceptions across different demographic groups, such as proficiency levels, faculties, or gender. Future research could explore these differences to provide a clearer understanding of the findings.

As a single case study involving one cohort at a single institution, this investigation does not claim broader applicability or consistency of its findings across varied educational contexts. Student engagement with a CEFR-based language development system is intrinsically shaped by contextual factors, with variations emerging across different educational settings and learner demographics. Rather than making broad generalizations, this study highlights important components that should be taken into consideration when designing such a system, particularly in relation to course alignment, materials development, and room for creativity. Essentially, although students may learn English in different ways, teachers remain the cornerstone of supporting and motivating learners within such a development system.

Author Contributions

NJ: Conceptualization, data analysis, resources, and writing—original draft preparation. KS: Conceptualization, data analysis, resources, writing—original draft preparation, and project administration. Both NJ and KS contributed to the methodology, software, instrument validation, and writing—review and editing the manuscript.

Declaration of the Use of Generative AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT, based on GPT-5.3 to assist with language editing and polishing of the draft. The tool was used solely to improve clarity, grammar, and overall readability. The authors reviewed and revised the output as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

Ethics

This study received ethical approval from Silpakorn University Research Committee, Approval No. COE 67.0502-031.

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Appendix A

Open-Ended Questions

1. What do you know about the English language development system?
2. How could the English language development system help you succeed in learning English?
3. What did you like about the English language development system?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the English language development system?