PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE CEFR-BASED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST: A CASE OF THE STUDENT-TEACHER IN THE TEACHER FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT AT ONE UNIVERSITY IN THAILAND

การรับรู้ของนิสิตนักศึกษาวิชาชีพครูต่อข้อสอบวัดสมิทธิภาพทางภาษาอังกฤษที่ใช้ CEFR เป็นฐาน: กรณีศึกษาของผู้เข้าร่วมโครงการผลิตครูเพื่อพัฒนาท้องถิ่น ในมหาวิทยาลัยแห่งหนึ่งในประเทศไทย

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Abstract

Every year, thousands of Thai student teachers, regardless of their majors, take the high-stakes English proficiency test to fulfill the requirements of the Teacher for Local Development Project. They need to obtain the minimum scores on the CEFR-based English proficiency tests to be appointed as in-service teachers. Given it affects future careers, the CEFR-based English proficiency test becomes one of the most high-stakes tests for student teachers in Thailand. The aim of the present study was to determine the perception that student teachers in the Teacher for Local Development Project had regarding CEFR-based English proficiency tests. Employing an exploratory design, the questionnaire was used to collect data from an intact group of seventeen non-English major student teachers from one public university in Thailand. According to the result, the requirement of the CEFR-based English proficiency test had both positive and negative feedback among the participants. Their perceived levels of awareness and familiarity with the CEFR-based English proficiency test were at high and moderate levels, respectively. They also encountered challenges due to inadequate information about the test they were about to take in their final year of teacher education. A glimpse of the contradiction between the intention of the policy and the washback of the test was also surfaced. In light of the finding, the final section of this study discusses helpful recommendations for promoting a positive perception among student teachers, as well as future research directions.

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บทคัดย่อ

ในแต่ละปี นิสิตนักศึกษาวิชาชีพครูจำนวนมากจากทุกสาขาวิชาเอก จำเป็นต้องเข้าสอบวัดสมิทธิภาพทาง
ภาษาอังกฤษ เพื่อให้ตนเองมีคุณสมบัติครบถ้วนตามข้อกำหนดการคัดเลือกเข้าร่วมโครงการผลิตครูเพื่อพัฒนาท้อง
ถิ่น โดยนิสิตนักศึกษาวิชาชีพครูเหล่านี้จำเป็นต้องมีคะแนนสอบวัดสมิทธิภาพทางภาษาอังกฤษขั้นต่ำตามเกณฑ์ที่
กำหนดเพื่อบรรจุเข้าทำงาน ปัจจัยอันเนื่องจากผลการสอบส่งผลอย่างมากต่ออาชีพการงานในอนาคตนี้ ทำให้ข้อสอบ
วัดสมิทธิภาพทางภาษาอังกฤษที่ใช้ CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Language)
เป็นฐาน กลายเป็นแบบทดสอบที่มีผลกระทบต่อนิสิตนักศึกษาวิชาชีพครูอย่างมาก งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ
ศึกษาการรับรู้ของนิสิตนักศึกษาวิชาชีพครูผู้เข้าร่วมโครงการผลิตครูเพื่อพัฒนาท้องถิ่นที่มีต่อข้อกำหนดและข้อสอบ
วัดสมิทธิภาพทางภาษาอังกฤษที่ใช้ CEFR เป็นฐาน

โดยสำรวจข้อมูลจากกลุ่มที่มีอยู่แล้วตามสภาพธรรมชาติของนิสิตนักศึกษาวิชาชีพครูจากมหาวิทยาลัยของ
รัฐแห่งหนึ่งในประเทศไทยที่เข้าร่วมโครงการผลิตครูเพื่อพัฒนาท้องถิ่นจำนวน 17 คน ผลการศึกษาพบว่าผลสะท้อน
ย้อนกลับที่เกิดจากอิทธิพลของการสอบนั้นเป็นไปในทั้งทางบวกและทางลบ โดยที่มีระดับการรับรู้และความคุ้นเคยกับ
การวัดสมิทธิภาพทางภาษาอังกฤษที่ใช้ CEFR เป็นฐานในระดับที่สูงและปานกลางตามลำดับ ระดับการรับรู้ที่เกิดขึ้น
นั้นเป็นผลมาจากการไม่ได้รับรู้ข้อมูลที่เพียงพอเกี่ยวกับการทดสอบทั้งที่กำลังจะจบการศึกษาในไม่ช้า นอกจากนี้แล้ว
ยังปรากฏร่องรอยของความไม่ตรงกันระหว่างเจตนารมณ์ของนโยบายการให้เข้ารับการทดสอบวัดสมิทธิภาพทาง
ภาษาอังกฤษกับผลสะท้อนย้อนกลับที่เกิดจากอิทธิพลของการสอบ ซึ่งนำไปสู่ข้อแนะนำในการส่งเสริมการรับรู้เชิง
บวกเกี่ยวกับการกำหนดเรื่องข้อสอบวัดสมิทธิภาพทางภาษาอังกฤษที่ใช้ CEFR เป็นฐาน ตลอดจนแนวทางการวิจัย
ที่สามารถต่อยอดขึ้นมาจากข้อค้นพบนี้ได้

คำสำคัญ: การรับรู้ของผู้เข้าสอบ, นิสิตนักศึกษาวิชาชีพครู, ข้อสอบวัดสมิทธิภาพทางภาษาอังกฤษที่ใช้ CEFR
เป็นฐาน, โครงการผลิตครูเพื่อพัฒนาท้องถิ่น

Introduction

High-stakes testing has long been a serious issue in education. It has been continuously
employed to determine whether or not the students, test takers, employees, and applicants are
fulfilling the standards. Higher standards and accomplishment are demanded by the stakeholders
such as the policymakers, test takers, and public interest (Oszakiewski & Spelman, 2011). The
results of the test are regulated by the officials and the impact and/or washback are reinforced
by the official obligations in many areas of the world to validate curriculum, control educational
institutions, recheck achievement, promote learning, and enhance quality (Shohamy, 2001; Wall,
2000). In addition, the high-stakes test is seen as the proper powerful tool for introducing changes

to the educational system. Its power is not limited only to the students but also spreads to the teacher preparation programs or curricula as well as the future teachers (Yildirim, 2010).

Test takers are considered the most important stakeholder since they directly experience the washback of the test (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). The washback of the test influences what and how the test takers learn (Spratt, 2005). The high-stakes examination always poses a significant impact and washback on the test takers. The test takers are more likely to achieve the test if they can identify the objectives and abilities that the test developers plan to measure. One factor that ties the test takers to a certain level of washback is perception which is defined as the process by which a person chooses, arranges, and interprets data to produce a meaningful overall image (Kotler, 2002). This factor is crucial because the test takers' perspective of test orientation, specific aspects of the exams, impacts, and level of difficulty have contributed to the shift in predictive patterns of their learning (Entwistle, 1991). Even though the perception towards tests can be different across the groups of stakeholders such as policymakers, educators, test developers, and so on, the test takers are still the group who requires a closer look (e.g., Chapman, 2008; Uri, 2021).

Studies in the field of language assessment emphasized test takers' perception of the test. It was found that the perception towards the test related to many other factors such as mode of delivery (Brunfaut, Harding, & Batty, 2018; Poonpon, 2021), test-taking motivation (Zhou & Yoshitomi, 2019), test design and implementation (Poonpon, 2021), test performance (Wu & Lee, 2017), test value (Wu & Lee, 2017), test anxiety (Wu & Lee, 2017), and learning process (De Saint-Leger (2009). In addition, when compared to poor achievers, high achievers had much more positive opinions of the learning environment (Ahmed et al., 2018). Therefore, the test takers' perception of the test, especially the high-take test, is one essential factor that must be taken into account.

The practice of high-stake English tests has been spread across the fields. In the field of business, many English proficiency tests are employed as a gateway to certain employers. For instance, the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is very popular among the airline industry, petroleum industry, and financial sectors. The use of high-stakes English tests also extends to the field of education. The test takers take the English proficiency tests (e.g. IELTS, TOEFL, CU-TEP) with the purpose to employ the results for their future education application, academic scholarship, and exit exams. Some English proficiency test is much more critical because the test takers' success or failure on these examinations could directly influence their choice of future careers given that these tests serve as a government obligation program (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2017).

One of the examples of the use of English language proficiency tests as a high-stake test is in the context of higher education and teacher education in Thailand, where English is taught and

employed as a foreign language (EFL). In Thailand, the CEFR-based English proficiency test becomes one of the high-stake tests for student teachers. The result of the English language proficiency test is the obligation of the graduates from the faculties of education who join the Teacher for Local Development Project or 'Kru Khuen Thin' [English translation – 'the teacher who returns their home regions'] Project. This program aims to promote the teaching profession by granting scholarships and/or career paths for a student-teacher who would be appointed the serve as a teacher in the local schools under the jurisdiction of the Office of the Basic Education Commission, Office of Vocational Education Commission, Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education, and Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. In addition, the applicants may receive many benefits such as extracurricular activities during the years of teacher training and eligibility to apply for scholarship to continue their graduate studies (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2017).

Those who join this program need to meet the requirements on their content knowledge and teaching skill or they will be disqualified from the program. Also, they need to submit the result of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)-based English proficiency test to pass the requirement to be appointed as teachers. The requirements for English proficiency are varied depending on the choices of teaching majors. If failed to provide the scores in time, it may cost their future teaching careers too. If they are English teaching major student teachers, it is regulated that the minimum English proficiency must be C1 level. As a part of the process, they need to submit the result of one of the following English proficiency tests.

- A minimum TOEFL ITP score of 550;
- A minimum TOEFL iBT score of 79;
- A minimum IELTS score of 6.5;
- A minimum TOEIC score of 700;
- A minimum CU-TEP score of 89; or

Any other test that is equivalent to the C1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

For non-English major student teachers, the minimum requirement is a B1 level of CEFR. To be appointed as teachers, they need to submit the result of one of the following English proficiency tests.

- A minimum TOEFL ITP score of 473;
- A minimum TOEFL iBT score of 52;
- A minimum IELTS score of 5;
- A minimum TOEIC score of 500;
- A minimum CU-TEP score of 56; or

Any other test that is equivalent to the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

This regulation can be considered a high stake one since the applicant who fails to submit the test results by the deadline will be excluded from the program (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2017). The exam-oriented policy is one of the initiatives established to encourage the improvement of civil service English proficiency. One of the frameworks that are frequently applied in Thailand is the CEFR or Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Foley, 2019). It is a European scale that can be applied to any European language (Council of Europe, 2001). Many standardized and language proficiency tests now include CEFR-level equivalents. According to the Council of Europe (2018), this framework is a global standard for describing linguistic ability. The scales consist of six descriptors to describe language proficiency levels, ranging from A1 (Basic User) to C2 (Proficient User) (See Figure 1).
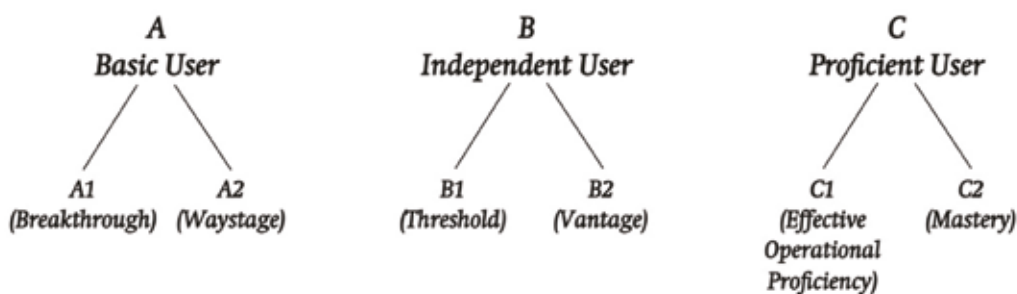

Figure 1: Common Reference Levels: Global-scale (Council of Europe, 2001)

The framework has been divided into 6 scales with can-do statements as follows (See Table 1): The highlighted ones are the requirements of the student teachers who join the Teacher for Local Development Project.

Table 1: Common Reference Levels: Global Scale (Council of Europe, 2001)

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

Although rules are set and the student-teachers are well-aware of these requirements, the English proficiency test score is still a difficult checkpoint for those participating in this project. Most recently, in 2022, the Office of Basic Education Commission announced that 1,661 student-teachers throughout the country had been selected for the project. Of those, 26 were pending confirmation of their English test results (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2022). Regarding the challenges of the test and the requirements, many candidates had called for the reduction of the requirement of TOEIC test scores to 250 points. However, the secretary-general of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) insisted that the criteria were determined and modified to recruit qualified teachers (Komchadluek, 2017). Similarly, the secretary-general of the Private Education Promotion Commission emphasized that an English proficiency test was required for the teachers regardless of their non-English majors. He stated that education innovation made great progress in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education, and this progress required ability in English. Hence, teachers who joined this project must have satisfied English test results. He also noted the significant washback of the English proficiency test scores as a catalyst to the student teachers' motivation to develop English proficiency (Komchadluek, 2017). Thus, the minimum requirement of English language proficiency remains for the student teachers in Teacher for Local Development Project or 'Kru Khuen Thin' project.

From the announcement of the regulation, the announcement of the successful candidates, and the complaints made by the project participants, it could be observed that there must be some difficulties and turbulence lying beneath the student teachers' journey and struggles to develop their English proficiency to pass the requirement. Little research has been explored on the perspective of those most directly influenced by the high-stake English proficiency tests – the student teachers who take the tests – despite the abundance of obligation concerning the advantages of test requirements. The perspective of student teachers on the requirements has received insufficient attention or study. As the student teachers are required to take the CEFR-based English proficiency test, it is necessary to explore their perceptions towards the tests and the requirements.

This study, therefore, aimed to investigate the perception of student-teachers who joined the Teacher for Local Development Project towards the CEFR-based English proficiency test. In particular, the study delved into the understanding of the perspective of the student teachers in the Teacher for Local Development Project towards CEFR-based English proficiency tests, which were the requirements for their future careers in the following aspects. First, the awareness of the CEFR-based English proficiency test took into account student teachers' awareness of standards, benchmarks, objectives, criteria, and level of proficiency of CEFR-based English proficiency test.

Second, familiarity with the CEFR-based English proficiency test investigated the student-teachers' perspectives on the minimum requirements, alignments, concepts, significance, CEFR global scale or "can-do" descriptor levels, and expectations of the CEFR-based English proficiency test. Therefore, the research questions were addressed following the research objectives as follows:

RQ1   What is the awareness towards the CEFR-based English proficiency test of the student-teachers who join the Teacher for Local Development Project?

RQ2   What is the familiarity towards CEFR-based English proficiency test of the student-teachers who join the Teacher for Local Development Project?

The result of this study was considered the preliminary stage of further investigation of the washback and impact of the CEFR-based English proficiency test on the student teachers who join the Teacher for Local Development Project. In addition, the main target was the group of student teachers who were considered one of the key stakeholders of the policy and the CEFR-based English proficiency test.

Research Participants

This study employed an exploratory design, which was described as research conducted to address an issue that is not yet well understood, gain better comprehension of the current issue, but would not produce any concrete solutions (Stebbins, 2001), to obtain insights from the participants. The participants of the study were an intact group of non-English major student-teachers from the Faculty of Education of one university in Thailand. They were purposively selected since they were the intact group of Teachers for the Local Development Project which made them the direct stakeholders of the test. The participants were said to be a self-selected sample as they were included in a group as a result of their application and requirement to be future teachers for the Teacher for Local Development Project. The preliminary interview revealed that they were the student teachers who were required to take any CEFR-based English proficiency test, as mandated by the project. In addition, they were the student-teacher in their last year of approaching graduation. All of them similarly reported completing four English courses offered by the university: English I, English II, English III, and English for Teachers and Educational Personnel. Many of them had not yet gained the English scores and would take the test very soon. Upon the agreement to participate in the study, seventeen student-teachers of the project joined the current study. The demographic information of the research participants is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Demographic information of the research participants (n = 17)

Category		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	13	76.50
	Male	4	23.50
Age	23 years old	11	64.70
	24 years old	5	29.40
	25 years old	1	5.90
Major	Mathematics Teaching	6	35.30
	Biology Teaching	4	23.50
	Chemistry Teaching	3	17.60
	Early Childhood Education	2	11.80
	Physical Education	1	5.90
	Art Teaching	1	5.90
Year of StudyPreferred future career	Fifth year	17	100.00
	Teacher	17	100.00
	Others	0	0.00
English courses completed	English I	17	100.00
	English II	17	100.00
	English III	17	100.00
	English for Teachers and Educational Personnel	17	100.00
CEFR-based English proficiency test-taking experience	Experienced	1	5.90
	None	16	94.10

According to Table 2, the participants were 13 female and 4 male 5th-year students whose ages ranged from 23 – 25 years old. They were from 6 various majors of study: 6 participants from Mathematics Teaching (35.30%), 4 from Biology Teaching (23.50%), 3 from Chemistry Teaching (17.60%), 2 from Early Childhood Education (11.80%), 1 from Physical Education (5.90%), and 1 from Art Teaching (5.90%) respectively. It can be observed that the majority of the participants were females (76.50%) compared to males (23.50%). In addition, the result indicated that 100% of the participants preferred to work as in-service teachers after graduation. Additionally, it should be observed that only one participant reported taking the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) at the time of the questionnaire distribution. As reported by that sole participant, after three times of sitting TOEIC examinations, she successfully passed the minimum requirement of the project but chose not to disclose the scores.

Research Instrument

To explore the participants' perception of the CEFR-based English proficiency test, the four-part questionnaire was employed in this study.   It aimed to collect the information of the participants' demographic information, level of perception towards the CEFR-based English proficiency test, level of familiarity towards the CEFR-based English proficiency test, and the open-ended session. A set of questionnaires was adapted from Uri (2021). The original English version was translated into Thai to accommodate the participants. The questionnaire's items were scored between -1 and +1 using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method by the three experts who checked the content validity and the equivalency of the translation. The IOC score was calculated using the following formula (Riviovelli & Hambleton, 1997).

$$IOC = \frac{\sum R}{N}$$

The IOC score showed that the Thai-version questionnaire demonstrated a high level of item objective congruence (IOC = 0.90). Some item was adjusted according to the experts' suggestions. For example, the initial Thai translation for the statement "I know the main objectives of the CEFR." was "ฉันรู้วัตถุประสงค์หลักของ CEFR" while the revised one was "ข้าพเจ้าทราบถึงวัตถุประสงค์หลักของเกณฑ์การสอบตามแนว CEFR".

A reliability analysis was conducted. Eight student teachers took part in the preliminary investigation, which served as a pilot study to check the reliability of the instrument. According to Nashwa et al. (2018) and Vasileiou et al. (2018), 10% of the overall sample size for the actual study was recommended as the sample size for the pilot study. The sample size for the pilot study might also be extremely limited because the actual sample size for the qualitative investigation was not anticipated to be very large. The questionnaire was considered good based on the high value of Cronbach Alpha which was 0.8 and above (Bond & Fox 2007).

The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 5 questions for demographic information, 20 survey items for the participants' familiarity with the CEFR-based English proficiency test, and 8 survey items for the awareness of the CEFR-based English proficiency test. The format of the survey was a 5-point Likert scale which represented meanings as shown below.

A score of 1   means the participant had a very low level of awareness/familiarity.

A score of 2   means the participant had a low level of awareness/familiarity.

A score of 3   means the participant had a moderate level of awareness/familiarity.

A score of 4   means the participant had a high level of awareness/familiarity.

A score of 5   means the participant had a very high level of awareness/familiarity.

Furthermore, the three open-ended questions were presented by the end of the questionnaire to explore the participants' additional opinions on the CEFR-based English proficiency test, requirements, challenges, solutions, and needs for a support system on their CEFR-based English proficiency test.

Data Collection

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all face-to-face appointments were not encouraged. To collect the data, the researcher met the prospective participants via Google Meets in April 2022. The questionnaire was administrated via Google Forms with an explanation from the researcher. To complete the questionnaire, the participants must register using their university email accounts to confirm their statuses and identities. The participants provided informed consent before participation. They were allowed to stop at any moment if they felt uncomfortable discussing their perception of the CEFR-based English proficiency test because of worry that doing so would function as a trigger for those who were expected to take the test in the short upcoming time. After that, the raw data was obtained using the spreadsheet for further data check and data analysis.

Data Analysis

To answer the research questions, the mean and standard deviation of each item was calculated using a statistical software suite program. The interpretation of the results was made using the following criteria.

1.00 – 1.49 means the participants had a very low level of awareness/familiarity.

1.50 – 2.49 means the participants had a low level of awareness/familiarity.

2.50 – 3.49 means the participants had a moderate level of awareness/familiarity.

3.50 – 4.49 means the participants had a high level of awareness/familiarity.

4.50 – 5.00 means the participants had a very high level of awareness/familiarity.

Also, the answers to the open-ended questions were transcribed, checked, and rearranged in sentence format. Consequently, content analysis was applied for analyzing the emerging themes.

Results

To explore the participants' perception, their awareness and familiarity with CEFR were explored and interpreted as shown in Tables 3 and 4. Also, the participants' accounts on the CEFR-based English proficiency test, requirements, challenges, solutions, and needs for a support system on their CEFR-based English proficiency test are presented.

Research question 1: What is the awareness towards the CEFR-based English proficiency of the student-teachers who join the Teacher for Local Development Project?

The participants reported their level of awareness of standards, benchmarks, objectives, criteria, and level of proficiency of the CEFR-based English proficiency test. as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Awareness of the CEFR-based English proficiency test (n = 17)

	Awareness ofthe CEFR-based English proficiency test	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	Taking a CEFR-based English proficiency test encourages the self-development of English language skills.	4.12	0.993	High
2.	I believe one of the main objectives of CEFR is to establish common proficiency standards or benchmarks nationally and internationally	4.12	0.600	High
3.	I believe one of the main objectives of CEFR is to provide a basis for comparison of the levels of language proficiency for individual who wishes to study or work abroad.	4.06	0.556	High
4.	I understand that each exam employs different test specifications, even if they are on the same CEFR criteria.	4.00	0.935	High
5.	The use of the CEFR criteria is a policy that has an effect or significance on the development of English proficiency.	3.88	1.054	High
6.	English language scores can confirm that I can use English for work.	3.59	1.004	High
7.	I know the main objectives of the CEFR.	3.59	0.618	High
8.	I understand how the scores from the CEFR-based English proficiency test are used to qualify for the packing exam.	2.76	1.147	Moderate
	Total	**3.77**	**0.863**	**High**

Table 3 shows the participants' awareness of the CEFR-based English proficiency test. Overall, the participants perceived that they had a high level of awareness of the CEFR-based English proficiency test (mean = 3.77). They equally ranked their awareness of the main objectives of CEFR as a means to establish common proficiency standards or benchmarks nationally and internationally and the benefits of taking CEFR-based English proficiency test as an encouragement to self-development of English language skills as the top two (mean = 4.12). They were also aware of the main objectives of CEFR as a basis for comparison of the levels of language proficiency for individual who wished to study or work abroad, different test specification of CEFR-based English proficiency test, the main objectives of CEFR, the validity of the English language scores that could confirm their ability to use English for work, and the use of the CEFR criteria as a policy that had effect or significance on the development of English proficiency (mean = 4.06, 4.00, 3.59, 3.59, 3.88 respectively). All of these were rated at a high level. In addition, the participants also perceived

the moderate level of how the scores from the CEFR-based English proficiency test were used to qualify for the packing exam (mean = 2.76). Notably, even though the participants rated the overall result as a high level (mean = 3.77), only one aspect that received a moderate level of awareness was how the scores from the CEFR-based English proficiency test were used to qualify for the packing exam.

In addition, the participant's answers to the open-ended questions revealed that their awareness of the CEFR-based English proficiency test could be divided into 6 groups (Or coordinating sub-themes. (See Table 4).

Table 4: Coding themes for the awareness of the CEFR-based English proficiency test

Central theme	Sub-themes	Coordinating sub-themes	Numbers of excerpts
Perception	awareness towards the CEFR-based English proficiency test	Requirement	13
		Future career	7
		Contribution to the future career path	5
		Responsibility	2
		Self-development	2
		Course design	2

For the awareness of CEFR-based English proficiency as a requirement, the participants consistently reported that they were well aware of the requirement to submit the CEFR-based English proficiency test to the Teacher for Local Development Project (See Excerpts 1 and 2).

Excerpt 1: Participant 8

[The CEFR-based English proficiency test] is very necessary because I am a student who received a scholarship from the Kru Khuen Thin [literal English translation as 'the teacher who returns their local home'] Project [the Teacher for Local Development Project]. English language test scores [from the CEFR-based English proficiency test are required] …

Excerpt 2: Participant 15

The CEFR-based English proficiency test] is very necessary because I need the scores for my future career.

In addition, the high stake of the program, which might either influence their future career as a teacher or their elimination from the program, stimulated them to consider the CEFR-based English proficiency test and the result of the test as a very necessary process to go through (See Excerpt 3).

Excerpt 3: Participant 17

[The CEFR-based English proficiency test] is very necessary for the Kru Khuen Thin Project (the Teacher for Local Development Project)... We can also apply the score to many future possibilities.

Regarding the future use of English, the participants reported that they viewed English proficiency as a contribution to their future careers as teachers (See Excerpts 4 and 5) since they perceived English as an important skill for the profession.

Excerpt 4: Participant 5

...for my future teaching profession...

Excerpt 5: Participant 12

... [English proficiency] is very necessary because English is nowadays important in every profession...

They thought that, as a teacher, they needed to keep their knowledge and skill updated

and English proficiency was the key to exploring new knowledge as well as contributing to their future course design (See Excerpts 6 and 7).

Excerpt 6: Participant 7

...It is necessary to be able to communicate [in English] because the teacher needs to update new knowledge for teaching and developing their students.

Excerpt 7: Participant 9

...to update our knowledge of English texts.

Some participants pointed out that they needed English proficiency as a means of communication and self-development. He even foresaw that one day he might need to teach his subject in English (See Excerpt 8).

Excerpt 8: Participant 16

...When I taught my content subjects, some words were English words. Also, we might teach our content subjects in English, so we should be able to communicate and arrange the content in understandable English for our students.

The participants agree that the requirement of the CEFR-based English proficiency test could promote their English language learning despite the difficulties due to their non-English majors (See Excerpt 9).

Excerpt 9: Participant 10

...I admit that [passing the test] is hard for me because I am a non-English major..but I see it as a chance to learn English. And my friends too...

Therefore, it could be concluded that the participants perceived their awareness of the CEFR-based English proficiency test at a high level (mean = 3.77). When asked about the CEFR-

based English proficiency test, they reported that they perceive the CEFR-based English proficiency test as a requirement of the CEFR-based English proficiency test. It could be observed that their opinions were in positive ways such as the benefits for their future career, contribution to the future career path, responsibility, and self-development.

Research Question 2: What is the familiarity with the CEFR-based English proficiency test of the student-teachers who join the Teacher for Local Development Project?

The participants' level of familiarity with the CEFR-based English proficiency test was obtained and interpreted as presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Familiarity with CEFR-based English proficiency test (n = 17)

	Familiarity with CEFR-based English proficiency test	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1.	I know the minimum requirements of CEFR-based English proficiency test scores for government teachers/education officers.	4.29	0.588	High
2.	The teachers must be familiar with CEFR.	4.24	0.752	High
3.	I was formally introduced to the concept of CEFR at conferences, seminars, and workshops.	3.88	0.781	High
4.	I am well informed that the CEFR-based English proficiency test is a requirement for government teachers/education officers.	3.71	0.686	High
5.	I get to know about CEFR from readings (books, newspapers, articles, and the internet).	3.59	1.064	High
6.	I am aware that CEFR-aligned textbooks are available in schools now.	3.53	0.874	High
7.	I have been informed that the implementation of CEFR in Thailand.	3.41	0.870	Moderate
8.	I am aware that CEFR is aligned with teaching and learning in school.	3.35	0.862	Moderate
9.	I only have a vague idea about the CEFR-based English proficiency test.	3.35	0.606	Moderate
10.	I am aware that CEFR-aligned teaching materials are available in schools now.	3.29	0.985	Moderate
11.	I was formally introduced to the concept of CEFR during my in-service teacher training which is why I am familiar with CEFR.	3.24	0.970	Moderate
12.	I know the significance of the CEFR in educational policy.	3.18	0.951	Moderate

Table 5: Familiarity with CEFR-based English proficiency test (n = 17)

	Familiarity with CEFR-based English proficiency test	Mean	SD	Interpretation
13.	I am familiar with both CEFR global scale as well as "can-do" descriptor levels for all four English language skills.	3.18	0.951	Moderate
14.	I am very familiar with the CEFR-based English proficiency test.	3.18	0.393	Moderate
15.	I only know the name, not the content.	3.12	1.054	Moderate
16.	I know the main ideas and concepts of the CEFR-based English proficiency test.	3.00	0.500	Moderate
17.	I am aware that the Ministry of Education has set CEFR levels for students to achieve upon the completion of school.	2.94	0.899	Moderate
18.	I know the criteria CEFR is so good that I can explain them to others.	2.94	0.659	Moderate
19.	I am not well aware of the CEFR descriptors.	2.59	1.064	Moderate
20.	I get to know about CEFR from my colleagues.	2.53	1.179	Moderate
	Total	3.33	0.325	Moderate

Overall, the participants perceived that they had a moderate level of familiarity with the CEFR-based English proficiency test (mean = 3.33 respectively). As shown in Table 5, only 6 items of familiarity with the CEFR-based English proficiency test were perceived as having a high level of familiarity. They were familiar with the minimum requirements of CEFR-based English proficiency test scores for government teacher/education officers, the necessity for the teachers to be familiar with CEFR, the introduction to the concept of CEFR at conferences, seminars, and workshops, the requirements of CEFR-based English proficiency test for government teacher/education officer, the familiarity of CEFR from readings (books, newspaper, articles, and the internet, and the CEFR aligned textbooks in schools (mean = 4.29, 4.24, 3.88, 3.71, 3.59, and 3.53 respectively).

In addition, the participants perceived the rest of the items as moderate levels. They ranked from I have been informed that the implementation of CEFR in Thailand, I only have a vague idea about CEFR, I am aware that CEFR aligned with teaching and learning in school, I am aware that CEFR aligned teaching materials are available in schools now, I was formally introduced to the concept of CEFR during my in-service teacher training which is why I am familiar with CEFR, I am familiar with both CEFR global scale as well as "can do" descriptor levels for all four English language skills, I know the significance of the CEFR towards the educational policy, I am very familiar with CEFR, I only know the name, not the content, I know the main ideas and concept of CEFR, I know the criteria CEFR is so good that I can explain to others, I am totally aware that the Ministry of Education has set CEFR levels for students to achieve upon the completion of school, and I

get to know about CEFR from my colleagues (mean = 3.41, 3.35, 3.35, 3.29, 3.24, 3.18, 3.18, 3.18, 3.12, 3.00, 2.94, 2.94 and 2.53 respectively).

When asked about their familiarity with the CEFR-based English proficiency test, the participants elaborated on their perceptions in the open-ended questions. Their accounts could be divided into 8 main points: difficulties of different CEFR-based English proficiency tests, minimum requirements, alignments, concepts, significance, CEFR global scale or "can-do" descriptor levels, and expectation of CEFR-based English proficiency test (See Table 6).

Table 6: Coding themes for familiarity with the CEFR-based English proficiency test

Central theme	Sub-themes	Coordinating sub-themes	Numbers of excerpts
Perception	Familiarity with the CEFR-based English proficiency test	Difficulties of different CEFR-based English proficiency	17
		Minimum requirements	17
		Details of CEFR-based English proficiency test	14
		Specification of CEFR-based English proficiency test	1
		Significance	1
		Concepts	1
		Alignments	1
		CEFR global scale or "can-do" descriptor levels	1
		Fee (Financial issue)	1

Unsurprisingly, every participant was fully aware of the minimum requirement of the CEFR-based English proficiency test for the Teacher for Local Development Project. They claimed that they had heard the information on the minimum requirement from various sources: orientation, faculty's public relations, online platform, the online community for the student-teacher in the Teacher for Local Development Project, social media, youtube platform, and even the advertisement from the cram school and private tutors (See Excerpt 10 and 11).

Excerpt 10: Participant 10

...We all know that we (must) have 500 points on the TOEIC test to pass the selection... It is everywhere...Facebook group for Kru Kheun Thin (Teacher for Local Development Project), cram school advertisement on Facebook saying that they can help you pass...

Excerpt 11: Participant 2

...Orientation day...people talk about the minimum requirement of the test. The lecturers said so, and my friends said so...

Of a variety of CEFR-based English proficiency tests allowed for the student-teachers in the Teacher for Local Development Project, the participants perceived that TOEIC and CU-TEP were less challenged compared to TOEFL ITP, TOEFL iBT, and IELTS (See Excerpt 12, 13 and 14). Some of them gained this perception from their friends (See Excerpt 12).

Excerpt 12: Participant 9

...I prefer TOEIC because I think it is the least difficult. My friend took the TOEIC test three times and she passed. [She] told me that it is not difficult compared to the other tests...

Some gained the perception of TOEIC and/or CU-TEP as the least challenging one from the media and the test specification. However, the test specification in their perception was just a detail of the test, not the real test specification (See Excerpt 13).

Excerpt 13: Participant 11

...We discuss on Webboard, watch Youtube, and every course. They point out that TOEIC and CU-TEP are the easiest among them (the CEFR-based English proficiency tests allowed for the student-teachers in the Teacher for Local Development Project)....When I looked through the test specification, I think I cannot write or speak very well so IELTS or TOEFL might be too much. TOEIC and CU-TEP offer just a multiple-choice format without speaking or writing. I can study and do it ...

In addition, the financial support became a vital issue for the participant. One participant reported that she preferred TOEIC or CU-TEP because they fit her budget (See Excerpt 14).

Excerpt 14: Participant 7

... TOEIC and CU-TEP are not expensive. I can pay for that. The others (the CEFR-based English proficiency tests allowed for the student-teachers in the Teacher for Local Development Project) are too expensive. I cannot afford it...

Regarding the expectation of the test, the participants noted that they knew the assessment constructs of the tests. The participants claimed that the tests intended to test the language subskills necessary to achieve the desired result – English proficiency. They could recall the specification of TOEIC and CU-TEP quite well (See Excerpt 15).

Excerpt 15: Participant 5

... The listening section for TOEIC consists of 100 questions and 100 questions for the reading section. I am not sure about the time. For CU-TEP, it is more difficult because I need to prepare for grammar in the grammar part (Writing section of CU-TEP)...

Only one participant mentioned the aspect of concepts, alignments, and CEFR global scale or "can-do" descriptor levels. The participant realized the requirement for the non-English major student teacher who join the Teacher for Local Development Project was B1 level of CEFR. However, he failed to recall the descriptor or the can-do statement of the CEFR since he only focused on the minimum requirement of the test scores (See Excerpt 16).

Excerpt 16: Participant 11

… Maybe B1..the test score will be matched with B1…

Based on the finding, the participants perceived their familiarity with the CEFR-based English proficiency test at a moderate level (mean = 3.33). Also, they expressed their perception of the difficulties of different CEFR-based English proficiency tests, the minimum requirements of the test scores required by the project, and the specification of the CEFR-based English proficiency test that they planned to take. The two most popular CEFR-based English proficiency tests among them were TOEIC and CU-TEP. Nevertheless, the concept, alignments, and CEFR global scale or "can-do" descriptor levels of CEFR were mentioned only once.

Discussion

According to the finding, there appears to be a considerable positive association between the participants' perception and the implementation of the requirement of the CEFR-based English proficiency test. It may be due to the participants' favorable vision of their future careers that they give positive opinions towards the requirement of CEFR-based English proficiency test and the tests themselves. They perceived the requirement of CEFR-based English proficiency tests as an indicator of their English proficiency. Also, they perceived that the inspiration to pass the English proficiency test contributed to their future career path. Thus, for the participants in this study, the requirements of the CEFR-based English proficiency test is seen as a passport or key to a better future as in-service teachers in public school. This finding is consistent with Yildirim (2010) that the student teachers perceived the test result as a key to their careers. However, the participants in this study seem to view the impact of the test more positively. They might have got a piece of public relation information on the test and requirements from various sources. Also, the participants in this study did less mention of some detrimental consequences on their language skills and performance.

It should be noted that the participants had positive attitudes towards the requirement of the minimum scores of the CEFR-based English proficiency test. They had accounted for the requirement as a possible contribution to their language proficiency. There is a sign of positive washback of the high-stake tests. Also, the participants related the interpretation of the test results

to their future English communication. This finding is in line with Li et. al., (2012) who found that the high-stake test motivated the test takers to put more effort into their English language skills. Similarly, Wu and Lee (2017) found that tertiary students, regardless of their different levels of English competencies, had a positive attitude toward the English graduation benchmark policy. Wu and Lee (2017) also pointed out that the requirement of English proficiency test scores positively affected the students' perception of test value and their motivation to learn the language.

In addition, the finding indicated that the requirement of the minimum scores of the CEFR-based English proficiency test influenced the student teachers' perception in terms of familiarity and awareness of the CEFR-based English proficiency test. Remarkably, the participants knew the CEFR-based English proficiency test as the 'requirement' that needs to be overcome, not the framework for language learning, instruction, or assessment. This finding supports Ryan and Brown (2005) which noted that the rewards, pressure, and punishment entailed in the result of the test create the effect of the test itself. The participants in this study seemed to understand that all they need to do is to pass the 'minimum scores' requirement of the CEFR-based English proficiency test to get the golden ticket for their future careers. They only had a vague idea about the concepts and usage of CEFR due to the inadequate information about the tests.

Since the result indicated both negative and positive washback of the requirement of the CEFR-based English proficiency test in the Teacher for Local Development Project, it would not be practicable to propose the elimination or the reduction of the requirement of the CEFR-based English proficiency test. As the participants' level of awareness and familiarity towards the CEFR-based English proficiency test were at high level and moderate levels respectively, there is a critical need to consider promoting information on the CEFR-based English proficiency test in terms of the intention of the policy, specifications of CEFR-based English proficiency test, its significance, concepts, alignments of CEFR, and CEFR global scale or "can-do" descriptor levels. In addition, the preparation and public relation for the student teachers for the CEFR-based English proficiency test should attempt to promote more positive washback, decrease negative washback, and urge them to revisit the use of English for communication in their future careers.

Limitation and Future Studies

This study reveals the student teachers' actual perception of the CEFR-based English proficiency test. However, there are additional elements both internal and external factors which influence the student teachers' perception. Future research that is interested in investigating the perception towards the English high-stakes test among student teachers should take into account their background in the English language, their preparation for the test, and the sufficient information

provided for the test takers as a point of reference. In light of what has been discussed above, the consideration of the positive and negative impact and washback of the requirement of the CEFR-based English proficiency test should be examined to create a body of knowledge on the effect of the high-stakes test policy on the subjects' learning process. Also, the congruence among the actual perception, washback, and the intention of the policymakers should be examined. furthermore, the data collected for this exploratory study was supplied by a small intact group of non-English major student teachers in the Teacher for Local Development Project in the One University of Thailand. Future studies should recruit more participants from the Teacher for Local Development Project from other institutions to consolidate the results and findings. Last but not least, this study emphasizes the non-English major student teachers since there was none of the English major students available at the faculty during the period of the study. Thus, future studies should investigate the perception of English major student teachers since they are required to submit C1 level of CEFR-based English proficiency test which is considered more challenged.

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