# ACHIEVING B1-B2 CEFR LEVELS: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR THAI UNIVERSITY SETTINGS

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the comprehensive strategies required for Thai universities to achieve B1-B2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It highlights the significant opportunities afforded by this achievement, including enhanced academic and professional prospects, increased global competence, and improved international collaboration. However, it also addresses the substantial challenges faced, such as limited resources, cultural and linguistic barriers, and varying student motivation and attitudes towards English learning. To overcome these obstacles, the article advocates for a multifaceted approach that includes integrative curriculum design, technological integration with blended learning, and the development of a supportive learning environment through robust peer support and dynamic faculty development programs. This analysis provides valuable insights into the strategies that can facilitate Thai universities in not only achieving but also maximizing the benefits of B1-B2 CEFR levels, thereby enhancing the overall educational landscape and equipping students with the necessary skills and confidence to succeed in a globalized world.

**Keywords:** CEFR B1-B2 levels, Thai universities, Challenges, Opportunities, Practical Guidelines

## Introduction

Thai universities are integrating the B1-B2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) into their curricula to enhance global competitiveness and academic stature. This strategic inclusion not only improves language proficiency but also fosters academic and cultural exchanges, preparing students for worldwide opportunities (Taguchi, 2018). The CEFR categorizes language proficiency into six levels from A1 to C2, with B1 and B2 as crucial intermediate stages where learners handle complex texts and engage in fluent conversations (Council of Europe, 2020). These levels mark a significant shift for Thai universities from basic to more advanced language skills crucial for global engagement (Baker, 2021).

Located at a strategic point in Southeast Asia, Thai higher education institutions are aligning their English programs with the CEFR to enhance their international appeal and facilitate academic mobility. The focus on B1-B2 levels emphasizes the importance of English as a global lingua franca necessary for a competent workforce in international fields (Sapsford, 2019). However, moving to these levels presents challenges such as limited educational resources, cultural and linguistic barriers, and variable student motivation (Phoocharoensil, 2021). Despite these obstacles, Thai universities are implementing innovative teaching methods that are showing positive outcomes (Wiriyachitra, 2002; Taguchi, 2018).

This introduction sets the stage for examining the challenges, opportunities, and effective practices in achieving B1-B2 CEFR levels, underscoring their significance in enhancing the global stance of Thai universities and preparing students for the interconnected world.

## Understanding the CEFR

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is essential in language education, providing a system to measure proficiency and support learning, teaching, and assessment. The B1 and B2 levels are key, enabling learners to handle complex texts, participate in discussions, and express opinions (Council of Europe, 2020). For Thai universities, achieving these levels is crucial for enhancing English proficiency, expanding academic and professional opportunities, and improving global competitiveness (Gavranović & Prodanović, 2024; Thuy, 2024).

## 1. What is the CEFR?

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a global framework by the Council of Europe defining language proficiency across six levels: Basic User (A1-A2), Independent User (B1-B2), and Proficient User (C1-C2) (Council of Europe, 2020). It sets a standard for language learning, teaching, and assessment, helping educators and learners to set goals and measure progress. The CEFR covers essential language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—along with communicative strategies and cultural understanding (North, 2020).

This framework is vital in both education and professional sectors that require language skills and strategic policy-making. It helps employers evaluate job candidates' language abilities, supports educational institutions in curriculum development, and guides policymakers in creating language policies. It also standardizes language testing and certification, enhancing international mobility (Little, 2018).

The CEFR's emphasis on communicative and practical uses of language highlights the importance of real-world language applications and intercultural competencies, enriching learners' linguistic and cultural skills (Piccardo, 2020).

## 2. Importance of B1-B2 Levels for Thai Universities

The B1 and B2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) are crucial for Thai universities as they mark the transition to independent user status, enabling students to effectively communicate in English in various settings (Council of Europe, 2020). Achieving these levels allows students to understand and express main ideas on familiar topics in work and educational contexts, and handle situations that arise while traveling in English-speaking regions.

Furthermore, B1-B2 proficiency is often a prerequisite for international programs, like exchanges and internships, which open doors to global opportunities such as scholarships and international conferences, essential for academic and career advancement (Widodo, 2017). This proficiency also helps in the internationalization of Thai universities, attracting foreign faculty and students, enriching the academic environment, and promoting a multicultural atmosphere, thus

preparing students for international careers and enhancing their intercultural competence (Hamid, Nguyen, & Baldauf, 2013).

Moreover, reaching these levels requires Thai universities to revise their teaching methods, curriculum design, and assessment practices to foster innovation in language education (Kirkpatrick & Sussex, 2012). Targeting B1-B2 levels is strategic for enhancing educational outcomes, broadening professional prospects, and boosting the global standing of Thai institutions, necessitating a comprehensive approach that considers the linguistic and cultural specifics of the Thai educational context.

**Challenges for Achieving B1-B2 Level in Thai Universities**

Achieving B1-B2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in Thai universities requires overcoming challenges related to resources, cultural attitudes, and motivation. Limited educational materials, lack of native speakers, and under-equipped labs hinder progress due to financial constraints (Hamid, Nguyen, & Baldauf, 2013). Cultural and linguistic differences make English particularly difficult for Thai students (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Additionally, inconsistent student motivation, influenced by personal interests and career prospects, in an education system that doesn't prioritize language learning, complicates reaching B1-B2 levels (Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 2003). Tailored strategies are essential to overcome these challenges.

**1. Limited Resources and Infrastructure**

Achieving B1-B2 levels in Thai universities is hampered by resource and infrastructure constraints, including scarce language materials and inadequate facilities, reducing the quality of English education (Hamid, Nguyen, & Baldauf, 2013). Outdated labs and a lack of essential technology limit progress. Poor facilities hinder the integration of multimedia and online platforms necessary for skill development (Kirkpatrick, 2012). Financial constraints force reliance on outdated resources and a shortage of qualified instructors, especially native speakers, further affects instruction quality (Nunan, 2003). Universities often fail to prioritize language learning, limiting support for students to achieve B1-B2 levels (Wiriyachitra, 2002). Overcoming these challenges requires increased investment in educational technologies and a realignment of priorities.

## 2. Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

Cultural and linguistic barriers hinder Thai students' efforts to achieve B1-B2 levels of the CEFR. Significant linguistic differences between Thai and English and cultural attitudes towards language learning pose challenges. The linguistic gap between Thai, a tonal language with unique script and grammar, and English presents challenges, particularly with pronunciation, affecting spoken English and listening comprehension (Watkins, 2018). The traditional focus on rote learning contrasts with the CEFR's communicative methods, limiting real-life practice (Hengsadeekul, Chanchalor, & Murphy, 2014). Limited use of English outside academic settings also affects fluency and confidence (Smyth & Khlaisang, 2015). To overcome these obstacles, Thai universities need to implement more communicative teaching approaches, increase English exposure through media and programs, and foster positive attitudes towards English.

## 3. Motivation and Attitude Towards Learning English

Motivation and attitude significantly impact the success of Thai students in achieving B1-B2 levels of the CEFR, affecting engagement and the ability to overcome learning challenges. Motivation includes intrinsic elements like personal satisfaction and extrinsic ones like external rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Influences in Thai universities include personal goals, societal expectations, and the perceived job market value of English (Noels, Pelletier, Clément, & Vallerand, 2000). English's role as a global language opens job markets and educational opportunities, encouraging skill enhancement for career prospects (Koonnala, 2024). However, viewing English as difficult can reduce motivation, making learning daunting (Watkins, 2018). Anxiety can also impede progress (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Thai universities must adopt strategies that boost motivation and attitudes through practical methods, increased English exposure, and ongoing support to improve outcomes and help students reach desired CEFR levels (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Achieving B1-B2 levels of the CEFR in Thai universities is challenged by limited resources, cultural and linguistic barriers, and variable student motivation. Despite these challenges, the benefits, including improved academic and professional opportunities, make it imperative to adopt

targeted strategies and invest in language education. By addressing these challenges, Thai universities can equip students with the skills necessary for global success.

**Opportunities Presented by Achieving B1-B2 Level**

Achieving B1-B2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) provides significant opportunities for Thai university students and institutions by enhancing academic and professional prospects. These levels facilitate participation in global programs and prepare students for international job markets. They also foster international collaborations, expand networking opportunities, and increase students' self-confidence and global competence. Key strategies for reaching these levels include integrating curriculum design, utilizing technology for flexible learning, and developing supportive environments through peer and faculty initiatives. These approaches help overcome challenges such as limited resources and cultural barriers, leading to global readiness and improved educational outcomes.

### 1. Enhanced Academic and Professional Prospects

Achieving B1-B2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) enhances the academic and professional prospects of Thai university students, giving them a competitive edge in local and global arenas. This proficiency is crucial for engaging with the international academic community, accessing global job markets, and participating in global dialogues.

1.1 Academic Opportunities. B1-B2 proficiency facilitates participation in international programs like exchanges and scholarships, enriching students' educational experiences and intercultural competencies (Franz & Teo, 2018). This level also allows students to access extensive academic materials in English, enhancing their research capabilities.

1.2 Professional Prospects. Professionally, B1-B2 English levels open opportunities in the global job market, particularly in sectors like tourism, international business, and diplomacy, where English is essential (Charttrakul & Damnet, 2021). Higher English proficiency is associated with increased salary potential (Nakhornsri, 2020).

1.3 Enhancing Global Competence**.** Achieving these levels boosts global competence, preparing students for international careers. This involves effective interactions with diverse people, understanding global issues, and navigating cross-cultural communications. Proficiency in English is crucial for these competencies (Wudthayagorn, 2021).

In summary, B1-B2 CEFR levels advance Thai students' academic and professional opportunities, facilitating access to international educational and professional avenues and equipping them with skills for a globalized workplace. Enhancing English proficiency is essential for leveraging global opportunities.

## 2. International Collaboration and Exchange

Achieving B1-B2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) expands international collaboration and exchange for Thai universities, providing academic and personal development benefits. These levels are key in developing intercultural competence, essential in a globalized environment. Activities like role-plays and project-based learning enhance students' non-verbal communication skills and promote positive attitudes towards different cultures (Worawong, Charttrakul, & Damnet, 2017).

Virtual exchanges and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) play crucial roles in internationalizing educational experiences, connecting students worldwide and developing global competencies and critical thinking skills. For example, virtual exchanges between U.S. and Thai students have significantly improved participants' cross-cultural communication skills and global awareness (Duffy et al., 2020).

Furthermore, B1-B2 proficiency is often required for international programs like the Sakura Science Plan, facilitating effective involvement and access to new opportunities (Pereira & Kobayashi, 2021). These programs enhance educational experiences and provide vital skills needed for global professional success. Integrating CEFR-aligned language education in Thai university curricula enhances educational and professional prospects by fostering English proficiency and intercultural competence, preparing students for global opportunities.

### 3. Boost in Self-confidence and Global Competence

Achieving B1-B2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) boosts self-confidence and global competence among Thai university students, enhancing their self-perception and linguistic abilities for effective participation in global discourse and cultural exchanges. These proficiency levels improve students' ability to interact in international settings. Role-plays and project-based learning aligning with the CEFR have improved Thai students' non-verbal communication skills, crucial for global communication (Worawong, Charttrakul, & Damnet, 2017).

Studies show that students' positive self-perception of their English skills correlates with their actual abilities, highlighting the impact of achieving these levels on their confidence and practical language use (Kaewwichian & Jaturapitakkul, 2018). Further research by Huttayavilaiphan (2021) indicates that participating in CEFR-based intercultural communication activities enhances students' communicative competence and self-assurance, underscoring the benefits of reaching B1-B2 levels. These achievements bolster English skills and equip students with the confidence to thrive in a globalized academic and professional environment.

In conclusion, attaining B1-B2 CEFR levels is essential for boosting self-confidence and global competence of Thai university students, preparing them for international interactions and opportunities, and emphasizing the value of CEFR-aligned language education in Thai university curricula.

## Practical Guidelines for Achieving B1-B2 Level

In Thai universities, achieving B1-B2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is aided by practical guidelines like Integrative Curriculum Design and Technological Integration with Blended Learning. Integrative Curriculum Design enhances language application by linking skills to academic and real-world contexts, making learning more relevant. Technological Integration and Blended Learning combine traditional classroom methods with digital platforms, boosting student engagement and achievement. This approach provides

flexible, interactive, and personalized learning, making language education more comprehensive and accessible (Banyen, Viriyavejakul, & Ratanaolarn, 2016).

### 1. Integrative Curriculum Design

Integrative Curriculum Design is crucial for boosting English language proficiency at the B1-B2 CEFR levels within Thai universities. This approach aligns the language learning curriculum with relevant subject areas, ensuring that language acquisition extends beyond linguistic improvement to practical application in real scenarios.

The effectiveness of CEFR implementation in Thai educational policies often depends on the curriculum's ability to integrate these standards effectively into daily teaching practices. Variability in teacher engagement with the CEFR can be addressed by curriculum designs that clearly and accessibly incorporate these standards, suitable for all educators (Franz & Teo, 2018).

There is readiness among English teachers, particularly in institutions like Rajabhat Universities, to adopt CEFR-aligned practices, indicating a willingness to integrate curricula that meet international standards and promote consistent language proficiency (Charttrakul & Damnet, 2021). However, gaps in comprehensive CEFR understanding among preservice English teachers highlight the need for practical, context-driven curriculum models. These models prepare teachers better and enhance student outcomes by focusing on the practical use of language in real-life contexts (Phoolaikao & Sukying, 2021).

An integrative and action-oriented curriculum framework emphasizes the real-world application of language skills, essential for developing significant linguistic and communicative competencies and preparing students for global and professional demands (Bakar, 2020). In summary, Integrative Curriculum Design, complemented by Technological Integration with Blended Learning, is key to achieving B1-B2 levels at Thai universities, enhancing both linguistic skills and communicative abilities to meet international standards.

### 2. Technological Integration and Blended Learning

The integration of technological tools and blended learning in Thai universities has significantly transformed language education, particularly in achieving B1-B2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Blended learning combines online digital

media with traditional classroom methods to create a flexible, interactive, and personalized learning experience that enhances language learning outcomes.

Research by Banyen, Viriyavejakul, and Ratanaolarn (2016) supports the effectiveness of blended learning in improving student achievement and information literacy, emphasizing the importance of integrating e-learning with face-to-face interactions. This approach has led to increased student satisfaction through dynamic and computer-based activities outside regular classroom hours. Further studies by Anaraki (2018) show that blended learning, particularly through online video lectures alongside traditional classes, improves students' understanding and academic performance. Similarly, Banditvilai (2016) demonstrates that blended learning enhances language skills and fosters learner autonomy, improving listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities, and motivating self-directed learning.

These findings affirm the benefits of technological integration and blended learning in advancing English language proficiency at Thai universities, specifically for reaching B1-B2 CEFR levels. By using digital technologies alongside traditional teaching methods, educators can create engaging and effective language learning environments tailored to diverse student needs.

### 3. Fostering a Supportive Learning Environment

Creating a supportive learning environment in Thai universities enhances both student and faculty development, enriching educational experiences through effective peer support systems and faculty training programs. Peer Support Systems enhance learning outcomes significantly. Pechinthorn (2017) shows that peer teaching deepens subject understanding and develops leadership and communication skills. Additionally, flipped learning models and smart applications increase learning motivation and engagement by promoting active learning and collaboration (Khlaisang, Teo, & Huang, 2019).

3.1 Peer Support. Peer support is essential in Thai universities for enhancing learning environments, significantly benefiting students' academic and personal development. Through effective peer support systems, students achieve improved learning outcomes, increased self-confidence, and greater academic engagement. Pechinthorn (2017) highlighted the benefits of peer teaching in Thai universities, where students independently taught each other business subjects,

enhancing learning outcomes and active engagement, which boosted their motivation and leadership skills. Kewcharoenwong et al. (2020) demonstrated the effectiveness of peer-assisted learning (PAL) over self-study in interpreting electrocardiograms among Thai medical students, showing significant improvements in understanding and skills, underscoring the value of peer support in complex subjects. Mikum et al. (2018) showed that social media facilitated peer-to-peer communication in a computer programming course, significantly enhancing performance and understanding through collaborative learning. These instances affirm the significant role of peer support in improving educational outcomes and fostering comprehensive personal development in Thai universities.

3.2 Faculty Training and Development. Faculty training and development are crucial for enabling Thai universities to effectively support students in achieving B1-B2 CEFR levels. Enhancing educator skills, knowledge, and understanding of the CEFR standards critically influences their ability to guide students to these levels.

3.2.1 Importance of Faculty Training. Ongoing professional development is essential for educators to keep up with the latest language teaching methodologies and CEFR standards. Effective training programs improve educators' abilities to deliver content and integrate CEFR-aligned strategies effectively, thereby enhancing pedagogical skills and student outcomes (Phothongsunan, 2018).

3.2.2 Challenges in Faculty Development. A significant challenge is ensuring educators are proficient in English and familiar with the CEFR framework. There is often a gap between current faculty proficiency levels and desired outcomes, highlighting the need for targeted training to improve both language skills and teaching methods (Buasuwan, 2018).

3.2.3 Strategies for Effective Faculty Development Crucial strategies include workshops, seminars, peer observations, and international collaborations, which enhance language skills and facilitate the exchange of teaching practices. The Professional Learning Community model promotes a collaborative learning culture through resource sharing and feedback (Lateh et al., 2021). Integrating technology like online courses and webinars provides insights into effective language teaching practices and promotes pedagogical innovation (Park & Prommas, 2017).

In summary, comprehensive faculty training and development programs are essential for achieving B1-B2 CEFR levels at Thai universities, ensuring educators are well-prepared to support student success in language proficiency.

## Conclusion

Achieving B1-B2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in Thai universities involves addressing challenges that span linguistic, educational, and societal aspects. Attaining these levels opens up significant opportunities for students and institutions, including improved academic and professional outcomes, enhanced international collaboration, and increased self-confidence and global competence. Effective curriculum design and technological integration, especially through blended learning, have proven successful in creating engaging learning experiences that cater to diverse student needs. Additionally, fostering a supportive learning environment with proactive peer support and comprehensive faculty development is essential for promoting substantial language acquisition and cultural exchange.

The challenges, including limited resources, cultural and linguistic barriers, and varied student motivation, are significant. Yet, the potential benefits, such as greater international mobility, enhanced career opportunities, and an improved institutional global reputation, underscore the need for continued investment and innovation in language education policies and practices. As Thai universities strive to integrate global English proficiency standards into their curricula, it is crucial to adopt evidence-based strategies that address both linguistic and socio-cultural dimensions of language learning. By doing so, they will enable their students to achieve B1-B2 CEFR levels and equip them with the essential skills and confidence to thrive in an interconnected global environment.

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