A Framework of Reference for English Language Education in Thailand (FRELE-TH) — based on the CEFR, The Thai Experience

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Abstract

This paper discusses the development of the ten-level framework of English for Thailand based on the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR). This includes the steps involved, namely, the rationale, the drawing of the descriptors and their components, the focus group meetings with the stakeholders and the expert verification, the public hearing and the endorsement of the responsible institution. The discussion also focuses on the use of the framework for the English proficiency standards of academics and professionals for Thailand.

Introduction/Rationale

English is playing an increasingly important role in the international communication of people from all walks of life. With the ASEAN Economic Community Integration, it has become the *lingua franca* and is one of the two working languages in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). English has also become the key to success not only in education but for job applications and work promotion. According to Pitsuwan (2014), however, the majority of ASEAN people do not have proficiency in English. More importantly, despite a number of years Thai students spend on English learning in formal education, they are not able to use English in communication. They can guess the meaning of unknown words using the context clues but rarely use compensation strategies such as gestures when they cannot think of a word during a conversation in English (Pawapatcharaudom, 2007). Thai learners' performance in English is not satisfactory (Prappal, 2003). This low proficiency of Thai users and learners of English has been reviewed in the EF Proficiency Index (2015) in which Thailand ranked 62 out of 70 countries (EPI score of 45.35).

So far, to solve the problem of Thai learners' low ability in English, attempts at English reforms in Thailand have been evident starting from the National Education Act (1999). According to the National Education Act of 1999, English is not compulsory but it is one of the foreign languages required to be taught at secondary level as it is a required subject in the National University Entrance Examination. The importance of English has become more obvious with the major reform in the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008 with regard to English as a compulsory subject at the primary school level (Grades 1–6). This is, of course, to meet the goals of the Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012–2016) emphasizing the human resource development in all age groups by equipping learners with language proficiency of both Thai and English, developing skills for life-long learning, raising their moral and ethical principles, and recognizing rapid changes at national and international levels in terms of economic and socio-cultural impacts, especially for and from the integration of ASEAN community in 2015. This requires the national unity, learning standards and goals aimed to enable the children and youth to acquire knowledge and skills, favorable attitudes, and morality to serve as a foundation for 'Thai-ness' and universal values (UNESCO, 2011).

Regarding raising learning standards and goals in English, Thai institutions have developed their own standards of evaluation, and assessment such as the Chulalongkorn University Test of English Proficiency (CU-TEP) and the Thammasat University General English Test (TU-GET), mostly benchmarked with one of the international standards. There is rarely continuation of the standards at the national levels. Learners' and users' abilities in English, therefore, are gauged by a variety of standards and criteria. To illustrate, the English Language Development Centre (2005) measured the English ability of a number of professionals using four standards such as understanding and interpreting spoken and written language on a work topic.

Recently, the Ministry of Education has announced the use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as the standards to be adopted at all levels of education. Teachers and students have found that their English proficiency levels are too low to achieve the required standards. Concurrently, some countries including Switzerland and Japan have found adaptations of the CEFR, such as the CEFR-J, which is the adaptation of the CEFR for the specific teaching context of Japan, more relevant and workable. However, there is as yet no such attempt in Thailand.

With a purpose to enhance learners' English abilities to cope and perform effectively in the changing context, this study on the Framework of Reference for English Language Education in Thailand (FRELE-TH) — based on the CEFR, which was funded by the

Thailand Professional Qualifications Institute (TPQI), recognized a need to develop a framework of reference for the English language based on a common framework of reference for languages which is used internationally. The derived framework would be used to describe the levels of English proficiency of typical Thai learners or users in communicating in English in Thailand's local and international context. This study would suggest the levels of English proficiency that Thai learners or users with certain academic qualifications or with specific professional qualifications should be able to reach in order to fulfill the relevant qualification requirements.

The framework can be used as a reference to the English standards recommended for the qualifications necessary for academic reference and also for job recruitment and job promotion. The framework and the proposed standards can act as motivators for the personal development of skills in language and interaction with others; that is, individuals can use the framework and the standards to set their goals for personal development in English.

Research Questions

Question1: Among the common frameworks of language use currently available internationally, which framework of English reference should be appropriate to the Thai context and what constitutes its components?

Question 2: Can the derived framework of reference of English language be used to gauge the English abilities of Thai learners and users of English in the academic and professional context?

Literature Review

This part explores studies and research related to proficiency standards and language framework of reference and their implications.

Attempts to establish a language framework of reference and proficiency standards are well recognized in two contexts: The Common Core State Standards Initiative and the Common European Framework of References for Languages.

The Common Core Standards Initiative (2010) is an educational initiative in the United States that details what K-1 to K-12 students should know in English language arts and mathematics at the end of each grade. The initiative is sponsored by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and seeks to establish consistent educational standards across the states as well as ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit-bearing courses at two- or four-year college programs or to enter the workforce.

In fact, state educational standards have been around since the early 1990s. By the early 2000s every state had developed and adopted its own learning standards which specify what students should be able to do in each grade. It also had its own definition of proficiency, which is the level at which a student is determined to be educated sufficiently at each grade level and upon graduation. The result is, of course, the lack of standardization, an uneven patchwork of academic standards that vary from state to state and do not agree on what students should know or be able to do at each grade level. This is one reason why states needed to develop the Common Core Standards in 2009 so that they can ensure all students, regardless of where they live, are graduating high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life.

Nowadays, the District of Columbia, four territories and the Department of Defense Education Activity and forty two states including California, particularly English-Language

Development Standards for California Public schools, have adopted the Common Core and are implementing the standards and developing assessment.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): English Proficiency Competence analysis/descriptor
Although the Common Core standards focus on proficiency levels which specify the skills, knowledge and understanding required for students to have for each grade, they are not aimed to enhance communication which is so important in using the language especially in the international context of the community with a variety of languages and cultures with different educational systems.

In the member countries of the Council of Europe, an attempt to go beyond the border in terms of communication urged a need to develop a language framework of reference, so called the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001), so that people from different educational and cultural systems can communicate effectively and to raise the quality of communication of Europeans who have different language and cultural background (Council of Europe, 2001, p. xi) in order to promote freer mobility and more direct contact, resulting in better understanding and closer co-operation. This framework presents the description of language use by adopting the action-oriented approach, breaking down language competence into three components: communicative activities, communication strategies, and communicative grammar competences. Communicative activities, covering can-do statements, describe what users and learners of language need to do with the language or the activities they need to do with the language for communication. Communication strategies refer to strategies used by users and learners in performing communicative activities and they are considered as a hinge (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 25) between the activities and the users and learners' resources or communicative language competences they build up in the course of their experience of their language use and which enable them to carry out communicative activities and tasks in the various contexts of social life across language and cultural boundaries. These components introduced with suggestive examples of each category and sub-category are not in contextual sentences. The description of levels of proficiency is presented in scales with their illustrative descriptors of those components proposed which were based on the judgment of a number of public examining bodies, including teachers from a variety of educational sectors with very different profiles in terms of linguistic training and teaching experience. The set of these common reference levels, six levels, include C1, C2, B1, B2, A1 and A2. Levels C1 and C2 refer to proficient users; Levels B1 and B2 refer independent users; Levels A1 and A2 refer to basic users. The scale of overall descriptors, so called a global scale, summarizes the set of proposed Common Reference Levels in single holistic paragraphs for easier and better communication of the framework to non-expert users such as school teachers and educators. This framework is provided as a guide for those responsible for language learning to use it to suit the needs, motivations, characteristics and the resources of the learners and the users.

Further Development of CEFR
The Council of Europe also encourages users of the framework to adopt or adapt the scaling system and associated descriptors with examples to make it appropriate to the needs, characteristics, and local context of particular learners or groups of learners to make the framework more comprehensible and more practical as explicitly stated (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 30) as follows:

> You may well wish to keep some, reject others and add some of your own...the taxonomic scheme presented… of the framework is not seen as a closed system, but one which is open to further development in the light of experience,

Further studies and implementations of the CEFR (Alanen, Huhta & Tarnanen, 2010; Salmoura & Saville, 2010; Saville & Hawkey, 2010) are continuing. One of them is the EAQUALS banks of descriptors for can-do statements project (North, 2008) have been developed and examples of the exponents of the CEFR components are provided for the purpose of designing course teaching materials in English.

The Swiss Research Project
One of the developments worth citing is the Swiss Research Project 1993-6 (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 31-32; Goullier, 2006/2007; 2007) which introduced Pre A with the other nine levels, A1, A2, A2+, B1, B1+, B2, B2+, C1, C1 and C2 and later with ten levels including A1+ in the European Association for Quality Language Services or EQUALS (North, 2007). The plus levels were presented with the descriptors which "have been found transparent, useful and relevant". The framework has steps between the criterion levels A1 and A2 (A1+), between A2 and B1 (A2+), and between B2 and C1 (B2+). The scale with the plus level is presented in the illustrative descriptors with a horizontal line to distinguish the plus levels from the criterion levels.

> ... These "plus levels" were characterised by a stronger performance in relation to the same features found at the criterion level, plus hints of features that become salient at the next level. The "plus level" concept can be very useful in relation to school assessment because narrower levels allow learners to see more progress.
> Where this is the case, descriptors below the thin line represent the criterion level concerned. Descriptors placed above the line define a level of proficiency which is significantly higher than that represented by the criterion level, but does not achieve the standard for the following level…

(Council of Europe, 2001, p.36)

The plus level concept can be very useful for school assessment allowing learners to see more progress. Also learners can have more confidence when they realize what they have achieved and what is left to try to achieve.

CEFR-J
The CEFR has been widely used and adopted in many countries. Japan, for example, has adapted the CEFR to the English Language used in the contexts of Japan. The project was launched to construct CEFR-J and relevant resources, following a sequence of phases: Preparation-re-examining can-do descriptors, Revision with Teacher survey, and Expert survey, and Validation with School Piloting. With the can-do descriptors based on the original action-orientated approach, the framework consists of 12 levels: Pre-A1, A1.1, A1.2, A1.3, A2.1, A2.2, B1.1, B1.2, B2.1, B2.2, C1, C2. The development of the CEFR-J focuses on the characteristics of 'can do' descriptors, and how the original 'can do' descriptors were created and validated through a series of empirical studies. Three additional resources accompanying the CEFR-J are also described; the CEFR-J Wordlist, the CEFR ELP Descriptor Database, and the CEFR-J Inventory of English (Tono &Negishi, 2012).

CEFR-V
The CEFR in Vietnam was initially used by the Ministry of Education and Training. It has launched a 12-year project in which teachers' English abilities were assessed using the CEFR. It reveals that 83 % of teachers at the primary level, 7% of teachers at the secondary level, and 92 % of teachers at the upper secondary level still do not have English ability up to the required standards. Also, 45% of the university English Instructors had their English below the requirement. Recently, some attempts to develop the CEFR-V appropriate to local

and cultural context were made with the purpose to improve the English abilities of the Vietnamese (Hung, 2013)

Word Family Framework
As part of the Communicative language competence, vocabulary plays an important role in the overall abilities of learners and users. The CEFR, however, incorporates only several descriptors related to vocabulary range and control, describing learners' vocabulary repertoire at each level of the CEFR in the illustrative scales with no vocabulary examples or lists. Actually, vocabulary lists and examples are crucial for pedagogical purposes according to Trim & others (1980). They incorporated lists of themes (topics) and specific notions in the six levels in the series on the specifications for the Council of Europe earning program, one of which is Van Ek and Trim (1998). With the recognition of vocabulary importance, West (2015) introduced the word family framework (WFF) consisting of a database of over 26,000 vocabulary items in which a series of more than 6,600 word families are derived and arranged alphabetically to show how related words can be seen together and how these family members are aligned to the CEFR levels. Each entry of the WFF consists of a headword or root word, derivatives formed by a prefix or a suffix, compounds, phases and idioms and collocations (West, 2015, p. 61).

Considering the purpose, the learning context and the developments of the two Frameworks: The Common Core Standards Initiative and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the latter should be a more appropriate framework to base the framework of reference for the English language for Thailand as it should be established for enhancing Thai people's ability in using language for communication. Moreover, the framework has analyzed the language use in the three components: communicative activities with can-do statements, communication strategies, and communicative language competence necessary for communications with the six levels with transparent and relevant descriptors. More interestingly, the framework has been enriched by the Word Family List which can be useful for the teaching, learning and assessment in the Thai Context. More importantly, the framework has been adopted in many countries and further adapted to be used in certain countries in Europe and Asia.

Some Criticisms of the CEFR Descriptors
Despite the widespread adoption and adaption of the CEFR in many parts of the world, the framework was described as limited as a learner's model because the descriptors were "scaled teacher perceptions of the second language proficiency of learners" (North, 2010), not empirically supported by large-scale longitudinal studies of the actual process of second language acquisition. Also, the CEFR was developed for foreign language learning for adults, that is, learner-users as temporary visitors to other countries rather than those in long-term residence (North, 2010). Thus, it may not be appropriate for school setting. Some studies in English language acquisition including the English Profile Programme (Salamoura & Saville, 2011; Hawkins & Filipović, 2012) and the Second Language Acquisition and Testing in Europe (SLATE) projects (Alanen, Huhta, & Tarnanen, (2010), however, have tended to support the perspective of developing proficiency presented in the CEFR illustrative descriptors except for the linguistic accuracy and sociolinguistic appropriateness.

Regarding the use of the CEFR in the language curriculum, it has been suggested that the framework is powerful in giving the can-do statements of what is needed for language learners to do in the actual context of use. It has been recommended that the framework with the illustrative descriptors should be developed to suit specific contexts as Fulcher (2004) put forward as follows:

..The focus is on the way the CEFR should be used, if it is used. Even there the focus is on the descriptive scheme and on principles of best practice – not the levels, and certainly not on six rigid levels…

From this perspective, this study has explored how the CEFR descriptors can be best adapted to develop the Framework of Reference for English Language Education in Thailand (FRELE-TH).

Research Method

The study employed a qualitative/descriptive research method, based on the analysis and adaptation of the CEFR using the expert opinion approach and the stakeholders' engagement approach. These approaches were employed in establishing the CEFR as mentioned "the six-level frame used is based on the normal practice of a number of public examining bodies and the descriptors are based on those which have been found transparent, useful and relevant by groups of non-native and native-speaker teachers from a variety of educational sectors with very different profiles in terms of linguistic training and teaching experience. Teachers appear to understand the descriptors in the set, which has been refined in workshops with them (CEFR, 2001, p.30).

Figure 1. **Research procedure**
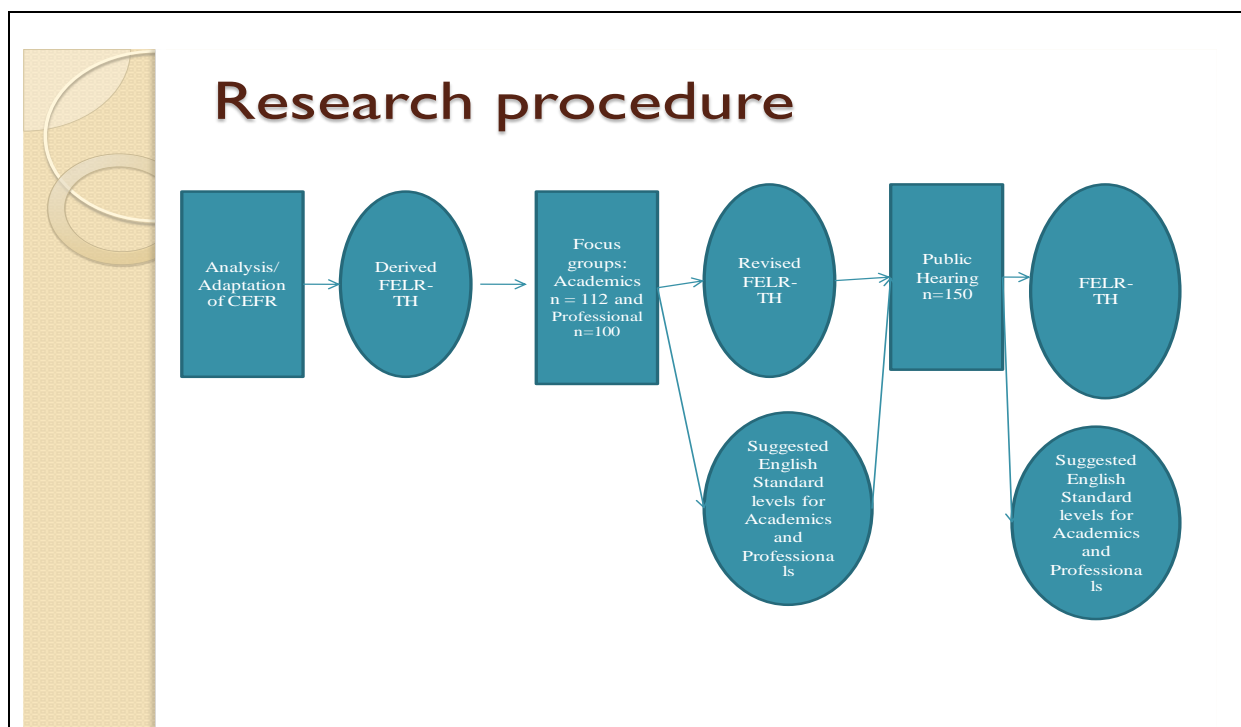
This study employed the procedure shown in Figure 1.

The First step: The analysis and adaptation of the CEFR and related literature
Based on the judgment of the Working Team, a group of experts in ELT from the different educational sectors, the CEFR was analyzed and adapted in relation to the use of English in the Thai context of local and international communication. Related literature includes the Swiss Project (Council of Europe, 2001; Goullier, 2006/2007; 2007)), EAQUALS projects (North, 2007, 2008) are also reviewed.

Study and analysis of the CEFR with the 6 levels covering the descriptors of the Global scale and illustrative scales reveal the following:

- Some of the descriptors of the six levels are too high and difficult for Thai learners/users of English to achieve. Also, some of the descriptors for the proficient users are not spelled out explicitly. Therefore, the CEFR with the plus levels are relevant to the Thai context of English use.
- English use in the descriptors is mostly common but just some of the descriptors are difficult for Thai readers/audience to understand due to some technical terms, complex structures, and difficult expressions with not many concrete examples.
- Some descriptors contain sensitive issues such as native/non-native English speakers.

The second Step: How to derive the FRELE-TH

The CEFR with the 6 levels, according to expert opinion, is too far-reaching for Thai learners to achieve, hence leading to the development of the ten-level reference framework. By dividing "A"(Basic levels) and "B" (Independent levels) based on "plus levels" from the Swiss Project and the EAQUALS, the 10 levels of the framework were developed in the illustrative scales and in the Global scale. The "C" (Proficient levels) was kept intact as not many Thai learners and users can reach these levels. To make the framework compatible/equivalent to the CEFR, the same salient features and the criterion features -those above and below the horizontal line in illustrative scales were maintained. Then the descriptors of the ten levels for all the three components: Communicative activities or can-do statement, Communication strategies and Communicative language competence were developed based on the CEFR original descriptors. Also some of the descriptors of the derived framework especially in the plus levels were adapted from the EAQUALS Bank of descriptors as they are more appropriate in the Thai context. More importantly, the salient and the criterion features of the descriptors of the CEFR were maintained.

Also, the exponents and examples from the EAQUALS project were added based on the fact that they are relevant in the Thai context. Most of the descriptors were kept. Some with difficult expressions and complicated structure, however, were adapted to be more comprehensible to Thai audiences by paraphrasing. Especially, most of the descriptors for the proficient users were made explicitly. Some sensitive issues such as native speakers and non-native speakers of English were avoided. Moreover, relevant issues or topics to the Thai context were selected and updated. Some examples include watching media, social media networking in the exponents and topics of Level 4. Also, it should be noted that a list of micro-skills for each level was included to make the framework more useful to Thai teachers and learners.

What is also relevant is the adaptation of the Word Family Framework. Served as a supplement to this 10-level reference framework, the word families on the original list were investigated and assigned to fit in the vocabulary range of the new 10-level derived framework. As a matter of fact, most of the word families were kept as they are in the same level but to distinguish the ones with more difficulty and more technical nature in the plus levels. Only in the case that the words and the word families are more common in the Thai context such as "pineapple' and "ant", they were assigned to a lower level as level 2 instead of levels 7 or 8 in the original word family framework.

The Third Stage: Stakeholder Opinion
The third stage involved the Stakeholder Focus Groups from the academics and the professionals. Each group consists of about one hundred participants from different sectors in the field to refine the derived framework with the descriptors. In the academic groups, the educational organizations at the three levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary were approached to send their representatives (*N*=112) to participate in the academic focus group interview. The professional groups were randomly selected from the telephone directory of the professional councils and the association of professions in Thailand, and they were approached to nominate their representatives (*N*=100) to participate in the professional focus group interview. The participants in the focus group were given a separate evaluation checklist for each group based on the ten-level FRELE-TH (See Appendices 1 and 2.) of the descriptors for each level for the whole set of the levels to gauge the abilities of learners and users of English in their respected fields. In their group, the participants were interviewed to give justification and clarification for their judgment and suggested standard levels of English for their fields. They were also asked to give feedback to refine the derived framework.

Then, the revision of the Framework was conducted after the two focus group workshops.

The Public Hearing Stage
Finally, the Public Hearing of the draft framework where one hundred and fifty participants from all of the sectors over the country were invited to attend. The sessions included the introduction and background of the development of the derived framework of reference for the English Language for Thailand and the description of the framework with its components, that is, the global scale of the overall descriptors and also the results of the two focus group workshops in relation to the suggested levels of English standard for the relevant academic and the professionals. The participants were asked to give their feedback on the draft framework.

The revision of the Framework was eventually carried out with the approval of the Steering Committee which consists of members who are experts from different fields of education at different levels. Also, they acknowledged the suggested standard levels of English for the academic and the professionals.

Results and Discussion
This part provides the results which answer the two research questions with the discussion.
Question 1: Among the common frameworks of language use currently available internationally, which framework of English reference should be appropriate to the Thai context and what constitutes its components?
The study is based on the CEFR. The development of the ten-level reference framework which maintains the salient and the criterion features of all of overall CEFR descriptors and includes more exponents from the EAQALS, the Threshold Level, the Core Inventory of General English, and the Word Family Framework. Figure 2 presents the structure of and components of the FRELE-TH. Figure 3 shows the equivalency of the CEFR and FRELE-TH. Figure 4 illustrates a sample of the overall descriptors reviewed and improved to make them more comprehensible and relevant to the Thai learners and users of English. They, however, maintain the same salient and criterion features as those of the CEFR.

Figure 2. Structure and components of FRELE-TH

Communicative activities	Reception	Listening	
		Reading	
	Interaction	Speaking	
		Writing	
	Production	Speaking	
		Writing	
Communication strategies	Reception	Identifying clues and making inferences	
	Interaction	Turn-taking	
		Cooperating	
		Asking for clarification	
	Production	Planning	
		Compensating	
		Monitoring and repair	
Communicative language competence	Linguistic	Range	Vocabulary
			General linguistic
		Control	Grammatical accuracy
			Vocabulary
			Phonological
			Orthographical
	Sociolinguistic	-	
	Pragmatic	Precision	
		Coherence	
		Fluency	

- Functions
- Discourse Markers
- Topics
- Vocabulary Range
- Grammar
- Micro-skills
- Word Family list

Structure and components of FRELE-TH

The FRELE-TH offers two scale types to describe English proficiency levels: global scales and illustrative scales, and their descriptors. It begins with the global scales, in which an overview of the language proficiency at all levels is presented. This is followed by illustrative scales, which consist of three aspects represented in separate tables: communicative activities, communication strategies, and communicative language competence.

Communicative activities or "Can Do" descriptors cover reception, interaction, and production. Reception involves listening comprehension and reading comprehension. Interaction involves spoken interaction and written interaction, and production involves spoken production and written production.

Communication strategies include the strategies that Thai users of English can apply as they perform communicative activities. These communication strategies include reception strategies in identifying clues and making inferences; interaction strategies in turn-taking, cooperating, and asking for clarification; and production strategies in planning, compensating, and monitoring and repair.

Communicative language competence refers to the knowledge that Thai users of English need to have in order to perform communicative activities. This involves linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and pragmatic competence. Linguistic competence covers "range" (linguistic and vocabulary) and "control" (grammatical accuracy, vocabulary control, phonological control, and orthographic control). Sociolinguistic competence refers to the knowledge and skills needed to cope with the social dimension of language use. Pragmatic competence, on the other hand, is concerned with the language user's knowledge of how messages are organized, structured, and arranged. It also focuses on the user's knowledge of the functional use of linguistic resources. Pragmatic competence in this framework includes precision, coherence, and fluency.

The FRELE-TH also offers examples of language functions, discourse makers, topics, vocabulary range, and grammar and some exponents and micro-skills, all of which are included in the appendices. A word family list based on the Word Family Framework (West, 2015), classified according to the FRELE-TH 10 levels, is provided in a separate appendix.

Figure 3. CEFR and FRELE-TH Equivalency Table

Standard Level	CEFR Proficiency Level	FRELE-TH Level
Basic user	A1	1
		2
	A2	3
		4
Independent user	B1	5
		6
	B2	7
		8
Proficient user	C1	9
	C2	10

Figure 4. A sample of the FRELE-TH Global scale, Levels 1 and 2 (Salient features are italicized.)

Level	Descriptors
1	The learner/user - *can recognize familiar vocabulary and basic expressions concerning himself/herself, his/her family, and immediate concrete surroundings.* - *can understand and respond to very simple expressions delivered very clearly and slowly, with some repetition and rephrasing on a predictable topic.* - can provide basic personal information about himself/herself in short, simple words, phrases, or basic sentences. - can understand frequently-used routines and patterns spoken or written in simple words, phrases, short sentences, and instructions about very specific and familiar situations. - can use a very basic range of frequently-used words, short phrases, and expressions on everyday topics to communicate and describe personal information, colors, simple numbers, simple objects, routine activities, etc. - *has very basic and limited isolated words and uses short phrases concerning concrete everyday situations.*
1	ผู้เรียน/ ผู้ใช้ภาษา - *รู้คำศัพท์ที่พบบ่อยๆ และสำนวนพื้นฐานเกี่ยวกับตนเอง ครอบครัว และสิ่งต่าง ๆ รอบตัว* - *เข้าใจและสามารถโต้ตอบกับผู้พูด/คู่สนทนาได้ เมื่อคู่สนทนาใช้สำนวนง่าย ๆ พูดชัดเจน และช้าๆ และคู่สนทนาอาจพูดสำนวนนั้น ๆ ซ้ำ(repetition)และพูดซ้ำโดยใช้ถ้อยคำใหม่ (rephrasing)เมื่อพูดเกี่ยวกับหัวข้อที่คาดเดาได้* - สามารถให้ข้อมูลส่วนตัวเบื้องต้นเกี่ยวกับตนเอง โดยใช้คำและวลีที่สั้นและง่าย หรือใช้ประโยคพื้นฐานได้ - เข้าใจคำศัพท์ วลี ประโยคสั้นๆรวมไปถึงคำสั่งที่ใช้บ่อยๆในสถานการณ์ที่คุ้นเคย ไม่ว่าจะเป็นทั้งในการพูดและการเขียน - สามารถใช้คำศัพท์ วลีสั้นๆ และสำนวนที่ใช้ในการสื่อสารเรื่องราวในชีวิตประจำวัน เพื่อสื่อสารและบรรยายข้อมูลส่วนบุคคล สี ตัวเลขพื้นฐาน สิ่งของพื้นฐาน กิจวัตรประจำวัน ฯลฯ - *มีคำศัพท์จำกัดซึ่งส่วนใหญ่เป็นคำโดดๆระดับพื้นฐาน และใช้วลีสั้นๆเกี่ยวกับสถานการณ์ในชีวิตประจำวันที่พบได้ทั่วไป*
Level	Descriptors
2	The learner/user - can understand simple spoken English carefully articulated at a very slow speed with frequent, long pauses. - can understand very short, simple phrases or sentences in written English. - can identify familiar or very basic words or phrases in texts. - *can understand and respond to daily routine expressions provided that they are carefully articulated at a very slow speed.* - *can describe people, familiar things, and places using basic verbs and common adjectives.* - *can write mostly very simple isolated words and phrases or sometimes sentences without connecting ideas using very limited vocabulary.* - *can guess the main idea of short spoken and written phrases and sentences on everyday, familiar topics.*

Level	Descriptors
	- *can use very basic phrases and groups of ready-made expressions to communicate and describe personal information, routine activities, requests, etc.* - *has very limited vocabulary for communicating in routine situations.*
2	ผู้เรียน/ ผู้ใช้ภาษา - เข้าใจภาษาอังกฤษง่าย ๆ ที่เป็นภาษาพูด เมื่อคู่สนทนาออกเสียงช้า ๆ ระมัดระวัง และหยุดชั่วขณะ (pauses) บ่อยครั้งและเป็นเวลานาน - เข้าใจวลีหรือประโยคภาษาอังกฤษที่สั้น ๆ ง่าย ๆ ที่เป็นภาษาเขียน - รู้คำหรือวลีง่าย ๆ หรือพบบ่อยในงานเขียนได้ - *เข้าใจและสามารถโต้ตอบกับผู้พูด / คู่สนทนา โดยใช้สำนวนที่พบซ้ำ ๆ ในชีวิตประจำวัน หากผู้พูดออกเสียงสำนวนดังกล่าวช้า ๆ และระมัดระวัง* - *สามารถบรรยายเบื้องต้นเกี่ยวกับบุคคล สิ่งของที่พบบ่อย และสถานที่ต่าง ๆ โดยใช้คำกริยาพื้นฐานและคำคุณศัพท์ที่พบทั่วไปได้* - *สามารถเขียนคำและวลีซึ่งส่วนใหญ่เป็นคำและวลีโดดๆ (isolated words and phrases)หรือบางครั้งเขียนเป็นประโยคง่าย ๆ ที่ไม่ได้เชื่อมโยงความคิด โดยใช้คำศัพท์ที่มีอยู่จำกัดอย่างมาก* - *สามารถเดาใจความสำคัญของวลีหรือประโยคที่ใช้ในการพูดและการเขียน ซึ่งมีหัวข้อเกี่ยวข้องกับเรื่องประจำวันที่คุ้นเคย* - *สามารถใช้วลีพื้นฐาน และกลุ่มคำสำนวนที่ตายตัวเพื่อใช้ในการสื่อสารและบรรยายข้อมูลส่วนบุคคล กิจวัตรประจำวัน การขอร้อง ฯลฯ* *มีคำศัพท์จำกัดในการสื่อสารในสถานการณ์ที่ทำเป็นกิจวัตร*

Figure 5. **A sample of the FRELE-TH illustrative scales, Speaking (interaction)**

LEVEL	OVERALL SPEAKING (INTERACTION)	CONVERSATION	DISCUSSION	INFORMATION EXCHANGE	TRANSACTIONS	TELEPHONING	INTERVIEW
1	Can understand and respond to very simple expressions delivered very clearly and slowly with some repetition and rephrasing on a predictable topic. Can understand and respond to very simple direct questions about personal details Can understand, follow, and respond to very short, basic, and clear instructions. Can understand and repeat very simple phrases.	Can use basic greeting and leave taking expressions. Can ask how people are doing. Can ask and answer basic personal questions about personal details using isolated words or short phrases if the other person speaks very slowly and clearly.		Can ask for information about familiar concrete objects using very basic questions using isolated words and phrases. Can answer short basic questions which are delivered clearly and slowly using some simple isolated words and phrases. Can produce short, simple answers responding to short simple questions based on pictures telling a short story.	Can use and understand simple numbers in prices or telephone numbers in everyday conversations. Can buy things in shops where pointing or other gestures can support what is said.	Can give his/her name when answering the phone. Can understand and answer very short basic telephone expressions as well as very simple questions.	Can answer very basic, familiar questions using short, simple isolated words or phrases.
2	Can understand and	Can engage in		Can ask for and	Can ask for the price	Can give basic,	Can give basic,

LEVEL	OVERALL SPEAKING (INTERACTION)	CONVERSATION	DISCUSSION	INFORMATION EXCHANGE	TRANSACTIONS	TELEPHONING	INTERVIEW
	respond to daily, routine expressions provided that they are carefully articulated at a very slow speed.	structured, very simple, very short conversations on daily familiar topics with considerable help of the interlocutor repeating, paraphrasing and slowing down the speech rate.		give personal information. Can talk about likes/ dislikes. Can tell the time. Can give information about numbers e.g. prices, and distance.	of goods or services in a shop. Can ask people about time and schedule.	prepared personal information on the phone. Can understand very short, basic phone messages.	personal information, e.g. name and job during an interview. Can respond to very basic, familiar questions using very short, simple words or phrases.
3	Can engage in structured, simple, very short conversations with some help of the other interlocutor . Can sometimes maintain a very short, informal conversation on familiar daily topics with some help. Can use basic polite language for greeting, expressing thanks, and apologizing.	Can ask and answer simple questions and respond to simple statements on very familiar topics.	Can express feelings and appreciation in a very simple way.	Can describe simple objects. Can indicate time using basic phrases.	Can make simple requests and suggestions and respond to them.	Can tell a short, simple story with basic words and expressions.	Can respond to some basic, familiar questions using common expressions. Can ask basic, familiar questions using common expressions.
4	Can deliver simple	Can engage in	Can express	Can maintain daily,	Can make basic	Can use basic	Can ask short,

LEVEL	OVERALL SPEAKING (INTERACTION)	CONVERSATION	DISCUSSION	INFORMATION EXCHANGE	TRANSACTIONS	TELEPHONING	INTERVIEW
	speech on daily, career-related topics using high-frequency lexical items and simple phrases and sentences. Can express opinions and present plans using simple explanations.	structured, short conversations with adequate help of the other interlocutor.	feelings and appreciation in a simple fashion.	informal conversation on familiar topics with some help when required.	requests and suggestions with help from the interlocutor.	narrative language to talk about everyday activities and personal experiences.	simple questions.
5	Can exploit a wide range of simple language for conversations on familiar topics, express personal opinions and exchange information on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel, and current events).	Can start, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can express and respond to feelings and attitudes such as surprise, happiness, sadness, interest, and disinterest.	Can give or seek personal opinions in an informal discussion with friends, agreeing and disagreeing politely. Can help to solve practical problems, saying what he or she thinks and asking others what they think.	Can find out and pass on straightforward factual information. Can ask for and follow detailed directions.	Can deal with most transactions and situations whilst travelling, arranging travel or accommodations.	Can make basic telephone conversations with those who he/she is familiar with.	
6	Can communicate with	Can enter unprepared	Can follow the	Can exchange,	Can manage most	Can have prepared	Can provide

LEVEL	OVERALL SPEAKING (INTERACTION)	CONVERSATION	DISCUSSION	INFORMATION EXCHANGE	TRANSACTIONS	TELEPHONING	INTERVIEW
	some confidence on familiar routine and non-routine matters related to his/her interests and professional field, but may have some difficulty in expressing exactly what he/she would like to communicate.	into conversations on familiar topics. Can maintain a conversation as well as understand and respond to feelings, impressions, opinions and expectations on everyday issues and simple abstract concepts.	discussion provided that the interlocutors avoid very idiomatic usage. Can give and seek personal opinions in informal and formal discussions, but may have some difficulties engaging in debate.	check, and confirm accumulated factual information on familiar routine and non-routine matters within his/her field with some confidence.	situations in person that are likely to arise while requesting services, arranging travel and accommodations, or dealing with authorities.	telephone conversations dealing with most transactions likely to arise while requesting services, arranging travel and accommodation, or dealing with authorities.	concrete information required in an interview/ consultation (e.g. describing symptoms to a doctor) but does so with limited precision. Can carry out a prepared interview, checking and confirming information, though he/she may occasionally have to ask for repetition if the other person's response is rapid or extended.

LEVEL	OVERALL SPEAKING (INTERACTION)	CONVERSATION	DISCUSSION	INFORMATION EXCHANGE	TRANSACTIONS	TELEPHONING	INTERVIEW
7	Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with speakers quite possible and can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining his/her views.	Can take an active part in conversation, expressing clearly his/her points of view, ideas or feelings naturally with effective turn-taking.	Can evaluate advantages and disadvantages, and participate in reaching a decision in formal or informal discussion.\n\nCan sustain his/her opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments, and comments.	Can find out and pass on detailed information reliably, face-to-face, and on the phone, asking follow-up questions and getting clarification or elaboration when necessary.	Can make a complaint effectively, explaining the problem and demanding appropriate action.	Can use the telephone to find out detailed information, provided that the other person speaks clearly, and can ask follow-up questions to check that he/she has understood the point fully.	Can take some initiatives in an interview, but is very dependent on interviewer in the interaction.\n\nCan use a prepared questionnaire to carry out a structural interview though he/she may occasionally have to ask for repetition if the other person's response is rapid or extended.

LEVEL	OVERALL SPEAKING (INTERACTION)	CONVERSATION	DISCUSSION	INFORMATION EXCHANGE	TRANSACTIONS	TELEPHONING	INTERVIEW
8	Can use English in extended conversation fluently, accurately and effectively on a wide range of general, academic, vocational or leisure topics, marking clearly the relationships between ideas, as well as provide feedback and follow up on statements and inferences by other speakers. Can communicate spontaneously with good grammatical control without much sign of having to restrict what he or she wants to say, adopting a level of formality appropriate to the circumstances.	Can engage in extended conversation on most general topics in a clearly participatory fashion, even in a noisy environment. Can sustain relationships with speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker.	Can keep up with an animated discussion, identifying accurately supporting arguments supporting and opposing points of view. Can keep up with an animated discussion between speakers. Can express his/her ideas and opinions with precision, and present and respond to complex lines of argument convincingly and persuasively.	Can understand and exchange complex information and advice on the full range of matters related to his/her occupational role.	Can cope linguistically to negotiate a solution to a dispute such as an undeserved traffic ticket, financial responsibility for damage in a flat or, for blame regarding an accident. Can outline a case for compensation, using persuasive language to demand satisfaction and state clearly the limits to any concession he/she is prepared to make.	Can effectively use the telephone to find out detailed and complex information, provided that the other person speak at a natural speed, and is able to ask follow-up questions to clarify meanings.	Can carry out an effective, fluent interview, as either interviewer or interviewee, expanding and developing the point being discussed fluently without any support, and handling interjections

LEVEL	OVERALL SPEAKING (INTERACTION)	CONVERSATION	DISCUSSION	INFORMATION EXCHANGE	TRANSACTIONS	TELEPHONING	INTERVIEW
9	Can express himself/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly on most topics, abstract and complex.	Can express himself/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly on most topics, abstract and complex.	Can easily follow and contribute to complex interactions between third parties in group discussion even on abstract, complex unfamiliar topics.	Can understand and exchange complex information and advice on the full range of topics related to his/her occupational roles.	Can cope to negotiate a solution to a dispute; can outline a case for compensation using persuasive language	Can identify himself/herself, take messages, communicating enquiries, explaining problems on a variety of topics, even not related to his/her field	Can participate fully in an interview as an interviewer and an interviewee, expanding the points being discussed.
10	Can understand and express ideas precisely and naturally on a full range of subjects.	Can engage in spoken interactions with complete fluency without linguistic limitations.	Can introduce an argument and give reasons in favor of the argument on a wide range of issues.	Can give and respond to feedback using appropriate conversational expressions and fillers.	Can communicate with accuracy and fluency on a wide range of topics in both formal and informal settings.	Has excellent telephone communication skills, including using appropriate greetings and endings. Can use language functions in an appropriate manner so that interlocutors can understand the meaning clearly.	Can provide appropriate and well-thought-out responses to questions.

Question 2: Can the derived framework of reference of English language be used to gauge the English abilities of Thai learners and users of English in the academic and professional contexts?

The derived framework of reference of English language or the FRELE-TH was used to gauge the English abilities of Thai learners and users of English in the academic and the professional context to suggest the following standards levels:

The Academics
The participants (*n*= 112) from the different groups of the academic sector namely the lower primary (Pathom 1-3), the upper primary (Prathom 4-6), the lower secondary, the upper secondary, the vocational certificate, the vocational diploma, the bachelor's graduate (non-major and English major), the master's graduate, the doctoral graduate were given the evaluation checklist (See Appendix 1.) to do. They also made their presentation on the suggested standards levels of the relevant groups with their justifications. The checklist and the presentation reflected the same findings which are shown in Table 1:

Table 1
Suggested standards of English levels for the academic groups

Academic groups n = 112	Current ability level	Expected ability level in three years
Prathom 1-3	1 – 2	2
Prathom 4-6	2 – 3	3
Lower secondary	2 – 4	4
Upper secondary	4 – 5	5
Vocational certificate	2 – 3 – 4	4
Vocational diploma	3 – 4 – 5	5
Tertiary: Bachelor's graduates	4 – 6	6 (non-English major) 7 (English major)
Tertiary: Master's graduates	4 – 6	6
Tertiary: Doctoral graduates	4 – 6	6

Based on the FRELE-TH checklist for academics, the academics have currently very low English abilities ranging from levels 1 to 3 for the primary, 2 to 5 for the secondary, and also for the vocational and levels 4 to 6 for the tertiary. After three years of more contact hours (up to 5 hours) in three years, the focus groups of the academic expected the abilities of all of the groups to reach the higher end of the range at the current level.

The Professionals
The participants of the professionals were mainly nominated from the Council or the Association of the professions (*n*= 100) from a variety of fields. They were given a checklist for professionals (See Appendix 2.) to do. The findings presented in Table 2 reveals suggested standard levels of English expected for the professionals to perform successfully with the corresponding skills in the relevant jobs.
Table 2
Suggested standard levels of the professions

Professional	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Writing
Tourist guide	10	7-9	10	5-8
Tour manager	7-10	7-10	9-10	6-10
Immigration officer	6-8	5-8	4-7	4-6
Secretary	6-10	7-10	4-5	5-10

Professional	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Writing
Engineer	8	9	7	8
Teacher of English	8-10	8-9	9	9
Army training commander	6-8	6-8	6-8	4-5
Architect	7 – 8	7 – 9	6 – 7	7 – 8
Nurse	5-6	6-7	5	5
Pharmacist	7	9	7	8
Customs officer	6	7	6-7	7
Taxi driver	3	2	3	2
Hotel General manager, HM, EAM	9-10	9-10	9-10	9-10
Hotel DHR, Executive secretary	8-9	8-9	8-9	8-9
Hotel DOFA	7-8	7-8	7-8	7-8
Hotel communications director	9-10	9-10	9-10	9-10
Hotel communications manager	8-9	8-9	8-9	8-9
Hotel communications assistant manager	7-8	7-8	7-8	7-8
Hotel communications officer	6-7	6-7	6-7	6-7
Hotel front director/Manager	9-10	9-10	9-10	9-10
Hotel front assistant, Chief concierge	8-9	8-9	8-9	8-9
Hotel shift leader	7-8	7-8	7-8	7-8
Hotel receptionist	6-7	6-7	6-7	6-7
Hotel housekeeping executive	7-8	7-8	7-8	7-8
Hotel housekeeping assistant executive	6-7	6-7	6-7	6-7
Hotel housekeeping coordinator	5-6	5-6	5-6	5-6
Hotel housekeeping supervisor	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-4
Hotel room attendant, Public area, Attendant	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2
Hotel food & beverages Director, Assistant director	9-10	9-10	9-10	9-10
Hotel food & beverages manager	6-7	6-7	6-7	6-7
Hotel food & beverages assistant manager/Supervisor	5-6	5-6	5-6	5-6
Hotel waiter	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-4
Hotel bus boy	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2
Hotel-sales marketing director	9-10	9-10	9-10	9-10
Hotel sales marketing assistant manager	8-9	8-9	8-9	8-9
Hotel revenue director, Manager	8-9	8-9	8-9	8-9
Hotel revenue assistant manager, Supervisor	7-8	7-8	7-8	7-8
Hotel revenue officer	5-6	5-6	5-6	5-6
Hotel engineering director	7-8	7-8	7-8	7-8
Hotel technician/Engineer	1-2	1-2	1-2	1-2
Hotel director	9	9	9	9
Hotel kitchen executive chef	8-9	8-9	8-9	8-9
Hotel kitchen executive sous chef	7-8	7-8	7-8	7-8
Hotel stewarding manager, Cook who need to work on cooking station	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-4
Hotel chief gardener	2	2	2	1
Hotel florist manager	2	1	2	1
Hotel spa manager	7-8	7-8	7-8	7-8
Hotel therapist	3-4	3-4	3-4	3-4
Attorney	6	5	7	4
Pilot	7	5	5	5
Tourist police	4-6	4-6	4-5	4-5

Professional	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Writing
Accountant (local/international)	3/7	3/6	3/6	3/7
Auditor (local/international)	4/8	4/7	4/7	4/8
Flight attendant/purser (international)	8	9	8	7 – 8
Flight attendant (international)	4-8	4-5	4-5	4-5

As shown in the table, Thai users of English have a wide range of English abilities depending on their professions. To illustrate, taxi drivers have low English abilities at level 2 in reading and writing, and level 3 in listening and writing. Also, hotel waiters, house-keeping supervisors, and hotel therapists have similar levels at 3-4 for all the four skills. It could be the case that the main duties of these professions are service focused on satisfaction of uncomplicated tasks. Engineers and architects have comparatively higher English abilities with a range of levels 6/7 to 9, similar to hotel engineer directors since they need to deal with cases prone to risk-taking as a matter of life or death. Interestingly, it is obvious that most of the directors and managers who mainly deal with negotiation and direct confrontation with foreigners are likely to have the higher English abilities at levels 9 to 10 in most of the four skills.

In addition to the suggested levels of English for the academics and the professionals, the participants in the focus groups and the public were asked to give their comments of the framework for further improvement. Most of participants in both groups stated that the checklists were transparent and had no difficulty in assigning the levels to their groups.

The results of the focus groups were presented in the Public hearing session. They were acknowledged with recommendations to implement the FRELE-TH so that the framework can be further validated and more application to materials and course development, test specifications and international benchmarking would be subsequently developed.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study of the standards of English abilities for Thailand discusses the development of the FRELE-TH with the ten-level framework of reference for English language for Thailand based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages with the plus levels by including the exponents and examples more relevant to the local and international context of English communication for Thailand. The derived ten- level framework was used to gauge the English abilities of the academics and the professionals in Thailand to make suggestions on the standard levels of English abilities for the relevant groups in the corresponding fields.

Further Research

The FRELE-TH should be used to gauge the English abilities of more academic and professional groups of learners and speakers in the Thai local and the International context to validate the results. Also, so far as English is a live language and a lingua franca, it is necessary that the framework need the on-going validation process to keep it vibrant with the internationally recognized levels of achievement.

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Appendix 1

Sample of FRELE-TH Checklist for Academics

The following FRELE-TH checklist consists of two parts.

Part I: Please provide the following information:

1. Name: _____
2. Affiliation: _____
3. Contact number: _____
4. E-mail address: _____

Part II: Please tick (√) the following checklist to record what you think your students can do in Column 1. Record what your students cannot do in Column 2.

Level 1	(1) Students can...	(2) Students cannot …
1 understand and respond to very simple expressions of communication delivered very clearly and slowly with some repetition and rephrasing on a predictable topic.		
2. . recognize very familiar vocabulary and basic expressions concerning themselves, their family and immediate concrete surroundings.		
3. give basic personal information about themselves in short simple words, phrases or basic sentences.		
4. understand frequently used routines and patterns spoken or written in simple words, phrases, short sentences and instructions in very specific and familiar situations.		
5. use a very basic range of frequently used words, short phrases and expressions of communication on everyday topics to communicate and describe personal information, colors, simple numbers, simple objects, and routine activities, etc.		
Other comments:		

Level 2	(1) Students can...	(2) Students cannot …
6. understand simple spoken English carefully articulated at very slow speed with frequent, long pauses.		
7. understand very short, simple phrases or sentences in written English.		
8. understand and respond to daily, routine expressions provided that they are carefully articulated at a very slow speed.		
9. give a basic description on people, familiar things, and places using basic verbs and common adjectives.		
10. write mostly very simple isolated words and phrases or sometimes sentences without connecting ideas using very limited vocabulary.		
Other comments:		

Appendix 2

Sample of FRELE-TH Checklist for Professionals

Skills	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Writing
Level				

FRELE-TH Checklist for Professionals

The follow FELR-TH checklist consists of two parts.

Part I: Please provide the following information:

1. Name: _____
2. Affiliation/Workplace: _____
3. Contact number: _____ E-mail address: _____
4. I am doing this FELR-TH checklist on behalf of :
   [ ] myself as a/an _____ (Occupation)
   [ ] my subordinate/employee who is a/an _____ (Occupation)
5. Your signature _____ Date _____

Part II: **Please tick (✓) the following checklist to record what you think a successful _____ (occupation) should be able to do to work both in the local and international context in Column 1. Give reasons or evidence to support your answer in the Remarks in Column 2.**

Level	Listening	(1) A successful ___can …	(2) Remarks
1	understand very simple, isolated words, phrases, and short simple sentences about familiar topics only when people speak very clearly and very slowly with some repetition and rephrasing.		
2	understand simple spoken English when people speak very slowly.		
3	understand simple spoken English with adequate facilitation.		
4	understand simple slowly-delivered English speech with everyday topics, containing daily life vocabulary and expressions.		
5	understand the main points of clear standard speech of approximately one minute in length on familiar matter regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc., including short narratives.		
6	understand straightforward speech on a range of topics related to his/her field and interest when the speech is clearly spoken in a generally familiar accent and a quite slow speech rate.		
7	understand the main ideas of complex speech on concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her specialization.		

Level	Listening	(1) A successful ___ can …	(2) Remarks
8	understand standard spoken language, live or broadcast, on both familiar and unfamiliar topics normally encountered in personal, social, academic or vocational life.		
9	understand the main idea of long both structured and not clearly structured talk or speech with normal and fast speed on abstract, complex and unfamiliar topics, but he/she needs to occasionally check details if the speaker has unfamiliar accents and uses colloquial expressions.		
10	understand any kind of spoken language, whether in a formal or informal setting, delivered at fast natural speed that may gear towards different audiences.		
Other comments:			